

Hashem said, "Because the outcry of Sodom and Amorah has become great, and because their sin has been very grave. (18:20)"

Even sin has limits. In order for Hashem to destroy an entire population, the evil must have stretched to its nadir. Indeed, we find only two places in the *Torah* which manifests destruction of such magnitude: the *Mabul*, flood; and the cities of Sodom and Amorah. True, other individuals sinned, but in these two incidents iniquity reached a milestone. What was there about these sins that was so baneful that the consequences for the sinners was total annihilation? As long as *teshuvah*, repentance, is an option, Hashem refrains from striking the final blow. Hashem's disciplinary measures are not punitive. They are therapeutic, a guide for us to mend our ways and return to the Almighty. In other words, the characteristics of the sin of the generation of the flood and the inhabitants of Sodom seem to have precluded *teshuvah*. *Chazal* teach us that while the generation of the flood was morally corrupt, Hashem sealed their doom only because of theft. Their theft was of a unique form. They stole only a *pachos m'shaveh perutah*, less than the value of a *perutah*, which is the smallest coin. *Halachically* speaking, this is not even considered to be stealing. A *Bais Din* does not punish a thief for such an act of stealing. Hence, the thief can even strut around, head held high, in total contempt of the law. Ostensibly, such a person will not repent. After all, what did he do wrong?

A similar behavior pattern was manifest in Sodom, where the people simply changed the rules to suit their needs. If an evil they sought to commit did not fit into their code of law, they conveniently altered the law. Thus, in their eyes, they did no wrong! If so, what would motivate them to repent? The people of these two generations had one thing in common: they did no wrong; they had no reason to repent. Consequently, there was no expectation that they would mend their ways. They would continue living an iniquitous lifestyle without any hope for change. This is why Hashem destroyed them. When one either does not care, or deceives himself into believing that he is doing the right thing; when there is no hope that a person will one day say, "I have sinned," then there is no hope for reprieve.