

Hashem said to Noach, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them." (6:13)

The people had become overtly corrupt. At first they committed immorality and idolatry. Then their sinning "progressed" to blatant robbery. Their covert sins led to overt corruption, for which Hashem would not forgive them. *Rashi* cites *Chazal*, who say that, indeed, Hashem did not seal their verdict until they began stealing from one another. This is enigmatic. Is stealing more sinful than immorality, idolatry and murder?

Horav Dov Eliezrov, zl, explains that while stealing is certainly not as evil as the three cardinal sins of immorality, murder and idolatry, it is, however, the bitter root of evil. It indicates the true evil within a person. A person who steals demonstrates his lack of belief that Hashem determines the amount of material possessions he will hold during the year. He shows that he does not trust Hashem to provide for him. One who steals displays a total moral breakdown. He is prepared to do anything to fulfill his needs. He will even take someone's life if he is challenged. In other words, stealing indicates that the other sins are not just the result of a temporary lust or error in religious perspective. Rather, they are the consequence of man's rebellion against the Almighty.

Furthermore, one who steals may be prepared to take someone's wife, if he so desires. He does not understand that Hashem has given certain possessions to certain people - and, in this instance, destined to be the owner. What belongs to my neighbor is his by right; it is his because Hashem has "given" it to him. One who challenges this idea, challenges Hashem. When the people of that generation broke down the boundaries indicating human possession, they showed their lack of conviction in Hashem. This was the true source of their iniquities. They no longer deserved to be forgiven, for they had progressed beyond the point of possible return.