

Now the earth had become corrupt before G-d, and the earth became filled with robbery. (6:11)

The *Baal HaTurim* writes that the *gematria*, numerical equivalent, of *chamas* (108) is the same as *mei Noach*, the waters of Noach – the Flood. The *Aderes* (commentary to the *Baal HaTurim*) asks: What relationship is there between *chamas*, theft, and the Flood? Where is the *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure? (Hashem's punishment has a distinct relationship to/similarity with the sin.) He quotes *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin*, *Perek Chelek* 108a) who teach, *B'roschin kilkelu*, with “heat” they created a spiritual blemish (sinned), with *roschin*, hot water (the Flood waters were unusually hot). *Roschin* alludes to their immoral behavior, falling prey to their heated passions. Where does *chamas*, theft, fit into the picture? He suggests that the immorality for which they were punished consisted of stealing one another's wives. This is comparable to *chamas* which is not ordinary theft, because the thief reimburses the victim, who would rather not sell. Immorality requires two participants. Since there was an element of consent on the part of the woman, the wife – stealing became *chamas*.

Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, *Shlita*, addresses why the verdict to destroy that generation was sealed as a result of *gezel*, theft. On one hand, *gezel* is one of the seven *mitzvos* given to *Bnei Noach*; thus, transgressing it would make the gentile liable for the death penalty. On the other hand, according to Torah law, theft does not warrant capital punishment. While it is certainly not commendable behavior, it is not as egregious as murder, immorality and other transgressions that incur the death penalty. The thief, of course, must return what he stole, which, to an extent, is a form of *teshuvah*, repentance/return. Thus, in comparison with the other behaviors committed by the generation of the Flood, *gezel* is a lightweight *aveirah*.

The *Rav* explains that Hashem deals with His People on the standard of *middah k'neged middah*. As a result, as long as one does not steal from his fellow, there remains room for the Attribute of Mercy and Kindness to find some merit to exonerate the sinner. These *middos* represent the last chance for this person. Therefore, even if a *middas HaDin*, the Attribute of Strict Justice, would warrant the sinner to receive strict punishment, Mercy and Kindness would protect him, because he has not acted in contradistinction to the sensitivities represented by these *middos*. Once a person is guilty of theft, however, he indicates by his actions that *chesed*, thinking of others, means nothing to him. *Chesed* implies giving altruistically, giving when one has no obligation to give. *Gezel* is the direct opposite, whereby one feels that he can take whatever he wants from whomever he wants. Thus, their fate was sealed because of *gezel*. They showed that *chesed* meant nothing to them. If so, Hashem had no justification to allow them to survive.