

For the earth is filled with robbery. (6:13)

Rashi quotes the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 108A, which teaches that the sentence meted out to the *dor ha'Mabul*, generation of the Flood, was sealed on account of *chamas*, robbery. The people committed many reprehensible sins. Promiscuity was a leading sin, but it was robbery that sealed their verdict. Clearly, thievery of any sort is repugnant behavior, but should it have been the one behavior that sealed their verdict? The **Tiferes Shlomo** offers a novel insight into the matter. He begins by questioning why Hashem took umbrage over the fact that the wicked people were stealing from other wicked people. Was it any different than wild beasts in the forest attacking and stealing from one another? It was not as if they were stealing from good people. They were all the same, so why bother?

The *Rebbe* cites the *Midrash* that quotes a dialogue which took place between Avraham Avinu and Shem ben Noach. Avraham asked what the merit was which stood in their behalf to save them from the deluge that had destroyed the world. Shem replied that it was in the merit of their extraordinary compassion for the myriad creatures travelling on the Ark. Throughout the entire duration of the Flood, day and night, they toiled without rest, to provide for the needs of their many "passengers." In return, Hashem rewarded them with their lives. *Kol ha'meracheim al ha'brios, merachamim alov min ha'Shomayim*, "Whoever has compassion on the creatures (all of Hashem's creations), Heaven will have compassion on him."

Likewise, had the people of the generation of the Flood had the human decency to care for one another and not rob each other blind, Heaven would have spared them. Since they did not exhibit compassion for one another, they were not deserving of salvation. Indeed, robbery sealed their doom, because it demonstrated that the single characteristic which could have saved them was alien to them. They simply were not worth saving.

In an alternative exposition, the **Melo Ha'Omer** offers a practical explanation for *chamas*, robbery, being the last straw. *Chazal* teach that Hashem does not afflict a person until after He has first warned him by "punishing" his possessions. A person who observes his material possessions being taken from him for reasons unknown should consider this a "wake-up" call. He is next. There is one "drawback" to possessions going first: he must have material possessions. If, for instance, one's material trappings are not his because he has stolen them, then they can be of little assistance in deflecting his personal punishment.

The people of the generation of the Flood were sinners who had to pay with their lives because that is all that they had. Their material bounty did not belong to them, since it was all stolen goods. They stole and stole, but ultimately they had nothing, since stolen goods do not protect – they indict. Indeed, it was these stolen goods that served as their greatest censure. We think that we have made a deal, pulled off a big one. If our actions are not absolutely *halachically* correct, we have gained nothing. In fact, our greatest liability might be in our "possession."

The **Brisker Rav, zl**, distinguishes between the ramifications of theft and adultery, which reflect the severity of each sin. Clearly, adultery and moral perversion are grave sins. The moral bankruptcy exhibited by such deviant behavior is caustic and unequivocal. After all is said and done, however, the sinners are only hurting one another. Their sin is consenting to an act of debauchery. While it is true that there are innocent parties in every act of infidelity, they are the indirect casualties. It is the players who are the sinners.

In an act of theft, there is a victim who is hurt, robbed, humiliated, and violated. He has lost his possessions, and he is in pain. When a person hurts, he cries out to G-d. The Torah writes in *Shemos* 22:21, 22, "You shall not persecute any widow or orphan. If you will persecute him...for if he will cry out to Me, I shall surely hear his cry." The *Mechilta* focuses on the need for the Torah to write, *V'hayah ki yitzaak*, "For if he will cry out," and, *Eshma tzaakaso*, "I shall surely hear his cry." I might think that Hashem "hears" only when the orphan actually cries out. What if the orphan swallows his pain and does not cry out? Does Hashem still listen? Yes, Hashem listens, even if the orphan does not articulate his pain. Why then does the Torah use both phrases? If Hashem listens regardless of the orphan's cry, the Torah should have only written, "I shall hear his cry." The answer is that when the orphan actually cries out, Hashem hastens his response.

We glean from here that Hashem's response time directly corresponds with the cry of pain evoked by the victim. Thus, we can understand the incongruity between adultery and theft. Adultery is a sin committed against man, with each individual participant acting willingly and with consent. There is no pain. There is no victim who cries out. When one is robbed, however, there is a victim who is hurt and humiliated. He cries out, and Hashem listens, quickly delivering His punishment. This is why the verdict against the *dor ha'Mabul* was sealed on theft. Theirs was not a victimless crime.