

For all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. (6:12)

The people must have been extremely evil if Hashem saw no resolution to their sins other than destroying them all – literally putting an end to the world as it existed. How bad actually were they? We know they were immoral; bloodshed meant nothing to them; and we can throw in idol-worship for good measure. Did this warrant an end to society? Was there no one other than Noach that acted in a redeemable manner? The Torah writes, *Ki hishchis kol basar*, “Everyone – everything had become corrupt.” How bad was their level of corruption?

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel gives us a clue to the level of their corruption. The Torah writes that, during the beginning of the flood, *nivke'u maayanos tehom rabbah*, “All the fountains of the deep burst forth (*Bereishis* 7:11). What did the people do when they saw water rising from the cracks in the ground? They used their own children to fill the cracks in the earth. Talk about evil! Can one imagine this perniciousness? Burying one’s children alive in order to save themselves! Hashem responded to them, “Do you think that you are more capable than I? Let us see if you can stuff up the cracks of the Heavens.” At that point, the Heavens opened up, pouring out a deluge that destroyed them all.

Having gained some insight into the sick minds of the people of that ill-fated generation, we now turn to the word *hishchis* to seek a proper definition of *hashchasah*, corruption. The Torah in *Devarim* 20:19 admonishes us not to cut down a fruit tree, *Lo sashchis es eitzah*, “Do not destroy its trees.” In *Hilchos Melachim* 6:7, the *Rambam* writes that one may cut down a fruit tree only for a legitimate reason which mandates its removal. He concludes that it is forbidden to cut down the tree *derech hashchasah*, in a destructive manner. This implies that *hashchasah* is defined as doing something wantonly, for no reason, to waste something, without care, acting for no other reason other than he wants to do it. *Hashchasah* is malicious destruction for the sole purpose of destruction.

The people of that generation had other ways of stuffing up the cracks in the earth. They used their children as a way of showing G-d, “You cannot scare me. You try to hurt me – I will hurt my children!” with nothing to be benefitted other than pure malicious destruction. People were stealing, but, in most cases, what they stole was insignificant, not even the value of *shavah perutah*, “penny.” Why did they do it? They wanted to. No other reason. Plain wanton, malicious destruction. It was their way of showing that they did not care. They were in charge, and no one could tell them how to live, how to act, or what to do.

When a generation plummets to such a nadir of depravity, whereby they sin maliciously, kill for fun, acted immorally simply because they want to, there is no reason to keep them around. They have not demonstrated anything about themselves that is of redeemable value. There is simply “nobody home.” If this is the case, Hashem will close down the house.