

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

The text seems to imply that these people were corrupt only in the eyes of Hashem. In the eyes of society, however, they apparently did no wrong. What type of people were they that they were paragons of virtue according to the rules of society, while they were iniquitous before Hashem? **Horav David Feinstein, Shlita**, cites *Chazal* in the *Talmud Sanhedrin 57A* who define ",ja,u", corrupt, as referring to immorality and idolatry. These are sins that do not really hurt anybody. Does anyone suffer if a person chooses to bow down to idols? Who is hurt by the immoral activities of consenting adults? The people involved in these sinful acts surely did not believe that they were engaged in criminal acts.

These people did not realize the extent of their invidious actions. The *pasuk* continues, "*And the earth became filled with violence.*" Their "private" activities became public misdemeanors, as what seemed like innocuous private acts led to a situation out of human control. People cannot rebel against Hashem and expect to be considered fine, upstanding members of the community. Iniquity before G-d results in criminal acts towards one's fellow man. Hashem saw the signs, man's subtle lack of respect for his fellow man, which resulted in a complete breakdown of society.

Hashem would never have destroyed that generation if the sins had truly remained private. Had the world continued to be a viable place for that society, it would not have catalyzed such destruction. Hashem knew that corruption / idolatry and immorality inevitably lead to injustice and violence.

Horav Feinstein cites a story related in *Talmud Nedarim 91a* as support for this idea. A story is told about a man who spent an afternoon in the private company of a married woman. When the woman's husband came home unexpectedly, the secret visitor immediately hid himself in order to avoid a scene. He remained in hiding until he saw the husband take a glass to drink from it. He immediately screamed, "Stop! I saw a poisonous snake drink from that glass!"

Chazal make a remarkable statement regarding this case. They concluded from this act of compassion that the visitor could not have committed a sinful act with the woman. Had this person been involved in an immoral act with the woman, the sin would have dulled his sense of compassion to the point that he would not have been motivated to stop the husband from unwittingly poisoning himself.

This is striking! How often do we hear people say, "My actions are between G-d and me. What I do does not affect anyone else." How untrue are these words! every sin transforms a person. It removes his "*tzelem Elokim*", G-dly image.

Hashem is the source of ethics and value. To disregard this fact is to remove oneself from the sphere of humanity as established by Hashem. Indeed, the *Midrash* elaborates upon the fact that

man was created in the image of a monkey as well as in the image of a man. Thus, if man rejects his *tzelem Elokim* by defiling it with acts of immorality, he is left with nothing more than his altar image - a monkey! Hence, those sins which we think are "private" soon become public, as our attitude changes as a result of our exposure to sin.