

ותשחת הארץ לפני האלהים ותמלא הארץ חמס
וירא אלהים את־הארץ והנה נשחתה כִּי־השחית כל־בשר את־דרכו על־הארץ

ויאמר אלהים לנח קץ כל־בשר בא לפני כִּי־מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והנני משחיתם את־הארץ

The earth became corrupt before Gd and the earth was filled with lawlessness. When Gd saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, Gd said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth.

Why does the Torah repeat the charge against living beings, particularly mankind? If the Torah tells us that the land self-destructed before Gd, why add that it was filled with חמס (crime)?

Chazal say that there were two distinct types of sin that Gd addressed. השחתה, as noted by וירא אלהים את־הארץ והנה נשחתה כִּי־השחית כל־בשר את־דרכו על־הארץ, refers to the sins of idolatry, עבודה זרה, and illicit relationships, גלוי עריות. חמס refers to theft, גזל. Ramban notes that in His conversation with Noah, Gd based His decision to destroy the world on the sin of חמס. Why didn't Gd mention גלוי עריות or עבודה זרה in reference to the השחתה, pending destruction of the world? Ramban explains that avoidance of theft is considered a מצוה מושכלת, an obligation that is easily grasped intellectually. Man can readily understand and appreciate the necessity to maintain law and order. Chazal refer to such מצוות שכליות as logical commandments that would be followed even had they not been written in the Torah.

Sins of השחתה, as in גלוי עריות and עבודה זרה, are considered מצוות שליליות (according to the jargon of Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon), commandments we must obey and restrictions we must adhere to simply because Gd commanded us to refrain from them. They are prohibitions that man would not place on himself if left to his own rational devices. [That is why the Ramban only refers to גלוי עריות and עבודה זרה and omits murder, שפיכת דמים, from the category of השחתה, since murder is also a מצוה שכלית.]

Gd tells Noach that He will destroy the world because it is filled with חמס. Gd says that even if He would be willing to overlook their transgression of the מצוות שליליות of עבודה זרה and גלוי עריות, He can't overlook their violation of basic norms and ethical behavior, their transgression of the מצוות שכליות of חמס and גזל, restrictions that they should have understood on their own and never violated. Chazal said that the fate of the generation of the flood, דור המבול, was sealed (נחתם)

because of their violation of גזל, which left an indelible mark on the generation and led to their destruction.

Why does the Torah use the words לפני האלקים when telling us that the generation self-destructed (ותשחת הארץ לפני האלהים)? We can readily understand using these words when describing the Mitzvah of ושמחתם לפני ד' אלקיכם. But how do these words fit here?

נפש tells us about שבועת הפקדון, an oath that must be taken by a person entrusted to watch an item. The Torah describes the concept of שבועת הפקדון as נפש כי תחטא ומעלה מעל בד' וכחש בעמיתו (a person who sins by committing a misappropriation offense against Gd by lying to his neighbor). Tosefta explains that such an offense against his fellow man can only be committed by one who has previously been מועל בד', acted inappropriately towards Gd. A Jew who fears Gd (בין אדם למקום) will refrain from acting sinfully towards his fellow man (בין אדם לחברו). Man is called a sinner not only because he violates the מצוות שכליות, but because he has violated the מצוות שליליות as well, and sinned towards Gd. Ramban says the same thing happened by the דור המבול. They started out with השחתה, by rebelling against Gd and the מצוות שליליות of idolatry and illicit sexual relationships and eventually ended up violating the מצוות שכליות of גזל and חמס.

למען נחדל מעושי ידינו, אתה נותן יד לפושעים, we recite תפלת נעילה, so that we may desist from the theft of our hands. Why don't we say למען נחדל מעברות ידינו, that we might desist from the sins of our hands? Why use a term like עושי instead of עוברות or עוונות that is more commonly used to refer to sin?

עושי is an all-inclusive term for all kinds of sin, similar to חמס. [When the Torah says כי מלאה הארץ חמס it means that man committed all kinds of sins.] On Yom Kippur we say that Gd assists man to repent for all sins, עושי, that he committed. When man sins he loses his privileges, זכויות, over himself. In תפלת זכה we say that Gd created man and all the parts of his body to serve Gd and act morally, yet instead we have acted immorally and we are thieves. The prophet Malachi asks how is it possible to steal from Gd? The answer is when man does not give תרומות, he steals from Gd. If Gd gives us wealth and we do not give charity, we are stealing from Gd. If man uses his hands or his legs for sinful purposes, he steals them from Gd who created them so that he might perform Mitzvos with them. We forfeit our rights, זכויות, over our own bodies. When we pray that we may desist from עושי ידינו, we ask that we be granted the strength to resist the sin of גזל, be it through the misuse of physical or material gifts given us by Gd. We

pray that we might not repeat our sinful past when we were guilty of עוֹשֶׂק יְדִינוּ, misuse of our hands, indeed our very existence.

The דֹּר הַמְּבוּל was filled with חַמָּס because they perverted their entire physical and spiritual existence. They were guilty of עוֹשֶׂק, violating all of Gd's laws between man and God and man and man, and were punished accordingly.

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