

NOACH (GENESIS 6:9-11:32)

Sweat the Big Stuff...and it's ALL Big Stuff!

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Do you want to know what makes G-d angry? I mean REALLY angry? I mean angry enough to destroy Creation and start again with Noah's family and a boat full of animals?

The answer is...very little!!!

The world was corrupt before G-d, and the world was filled with "Chamas" (which I will, for now, leave untranslated). G-d saw the world, and behold, it was corrupt, because all flesh had corrupted its ways on Earth. (Genesis, 6:11-12)

There were two issues bothering G-d. One was "corruption," which the Talmud (Sanhedrin, 57a) defines as sexual indiscretions and idolatry. The other was "Chamas." Which was worse? Let's look at the next verse, and see which of these two problems was the straw that broke the camel's back:

*G-d said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, because the Earth is filled with CHAMAS. I am going to ob**literate them from the Earth."*

The bottom line was *Chamas*. The world was filled with adultery, incest, and every sexual perversion possible. People were bowing down to trees and calling them "God." But G-d would not have destroyed the world for that. What really bothered Him was the *Chamas*.

What is *Chamas*? *Midrash Rabbah* tells us that *Chamas* is theft. But it is a very insidious form of theft. *Chamas* refers to the theft of an insignificant amount. People would surround a vegetable stand, and each person would grab a few beans, an amount too small for a court to get involved. (Would your local supermarket prosecute a "shoplifter" who sampled one grape in the fruit bin?) Before you knew it, the man's business was destroyed, and he had nowhere to turn for justice!

Those of us of the Jewish Faith have 613 Mitzvahs to fulfill. The rest of the world has seven. One of those seven Mitzvahs is the obligation to establish a court system to enforce the other six! The sin of *Chamas* was the act of circumventing the system to avoid judicial jurisdiction.

Normally we would tend to think that an embezzler of a million dollars is overwhelmingly worse than someone who steals a penny. And of course, he is. But in a subtler sense, the theft of the penny is much more damaging. When you take a tiny amount, you don't even realize that you're doing something wrong!

A little white lie here, a little padded insurance claim there. A paper clip or a postage stamp from the office. A little insult, a little gossip; no blood drawn, no harm done. A “victimless” crime, right? Not a big deal, right?

Wrong. When we take liberties with other people’s money and other people’s honor, the quantity is irrelevant. They say that there is no such thing as “a little bit pregnant.” There is also no such thing as “a little bit evil.” G-d destroyed the world because people looked for ways to avoid defining stealing as stealing.

Food for thought for all of us; especially our friends in the “legal” profession.

Have a great Shabbos.

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