

**Deadly Letter of the Law (Noach)**

*The law often permits what honor prohibits. -Bernard Joseph Saurin*

Thousands of years before our latest barbaric enemy called itself “ Hamas ” the Torah already uses the same word to describe the depravity of antediluvian man. The Torah recounts how the land was filled with “ Hamas ” and that is what forced God to wipe out mankind and start over again with saintly Noah and his family.

It seems that the lawlessness of man corrupted not only society, but the entire world. All sense of fair play had broken down to the point where the healthy functioning of society collapsed. Murder, illicit relations, and idol worship were commonplace.

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the *Kli Yakar* (1550-1619) on Genesis 6:11 quotes the above from Rabbinic tradition. He also cites the counterintuitive idea that the doom of the generation of The Flood was sealed because of the relatively minor sin of theft. And not just any theft – miniscule theft. The theft of items worth less than a ‘prutah’ (the modern equivalent of a penny, or maybe a nickel if you count a few thousand years of inflation).

What was so horrible, so catastrophic about such minor theft that warranted the destruction of all human civilization?

The *Kli Yakar* explains that it was actually an attitude of righteousness. The theft of less than a ‘prutah’ does not require prosecution. It is too small a value to bother the courts with. Therefore, the thief is legally innocent. These penny ante criminals were smug in the knowledge that they had outsmarted the system. They did nothing wrong. They were just below the radar of justice. They were within the letter of the law.

It seems this conniving “morality” really angers God. These characters, these righteous thieves, upset God more than murderers, adulterers, and idol-worshippers. Thanks to these weasels, God destroyed the planet.

May we be spared from such righteous people and remember to follow the spirit of the law, not just the letter of the law.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

*To Chanan Ben Ari on his new and timely song, Moledet:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wYEWx1291g>