

# Parsha Ponders

Noach | October 27, 2022 | 3 Tishrei 5783

## *Dor HaMabul's flaunting of Hillel's golden rule<sup>1</sup>*

ותשחת הארץ לפני האלקים ותמלא הארץ חמס

The world became corrupted before G-d, and the world was filled with violent theft<sup>2</sup>

Everyone knows about the flood in the generation of Noach. However, what's less known is that our Sages tell us that despite all of the lewd, corrupt behavior, and idol worship that occurred during that generation known as the *dor hamabul*, their fate was only sealed due to their sin of violent theft<sup>3</sup>. They would forcefully take things from their fellow, sometimes even paying for it<sup>4</sup>, but without permission. Why is this *the* sin which would cause the destruction of all of mankind?

There's a famous story<sup>5</sup> of the potential convert who came to Hillel the Elder. This potential convert asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah on one foot. Hillel responded that "what is hateful to you, don't do to your friend"<sup>6</sup>. This is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary, go and learn it. It makes sense that treating other people properly is a major aspect of the Torah. Jews should always be looking for opportunities to help another.

The obvious question on this principle is that how could it be the core of the *entire* Torah? There's two aspects to the *mitzvos*, there are one's between man and his fellow, and man and his G-d. The latter aspect seems totally disconnected from Hillel's principle! What did he mean? Rashi there<sup>7</sup> explains that, "that which is hateful to you, don't do to your friend", the friend in this context can be referring to Hashem. Meaning, the One Who loves you the most, don't do anything that upsets him. These are *mitzvos* between man and his G-d. We see then that Hillel's principle covers the entire Torah.

Hillel's core idea is that man wasn't created to think about himself. He's not the center of the universe. Indeed, someone once asked Rav Soloveitchik why Adam needed a wife, when he had Hashem to connect with. Rav Soloveitchik responded that having a spouse will teach him the lesson that it's not all about him. Hillel is teaching us that this is the fundamental principle behind the entire Torah, and in fact behind the entire creation. We need to always be concerned for others, and not only ourselves.

It's no wonder then why the generation of the flood was sentenced with destruction. G-d had to so-to-speak hit the reset button on creation, because they had totally missed the point. They were totally self-centered, and even took it to an extreme. They had zero consideration for another, to the point where they would take other people's possessions for themselves. They therefore forfeited the right to exist.

May we always be able think about others, and be able to properly fulfill Hillel's principle. Good Shabbos.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a *devar Torah* heard from Rabbi Yakov Haber, from Shapell's/Darche Noam (not to be confused with Rabbi Yaakov Haber of Ramat Beit Shemesh fame)

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 6:11

<sup>3</sup> Sanhedrin 108a

<sup>4</sup> Bava Kamma 62a; see also Bava Metzia 5b with Tosafos

<sup>5</sup> Shabbos 31a

<sup>6</sup> This is the inverse of the verse: Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). See Targum "Yonasan" ad. loc., who translates the verse like Hillel. Ironically, Yonasan ben Uziel was a student of Hillel. See also Rashi ad. loc., quoting Toras Kohanim ad. loc. and Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:3

<sup>7</sup> Shabbos loc. cit. His other explanation is that most *mitzvos* are between man and his fellow, which is a surprising statement. Someone should look into this and see if the *Rishonim* who count the *mitzvos* would agree