



To receive via email, reach out
to mishael@parshagrowth.com

GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT NOACH

Unholy?

In one of the timeless letters of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, a secular Israeli wrote to him, introducing himself as a chiloni. In his reply, the Rebbe devoted an entire paragraph refuting the premise of his introduction. "I hope you'll forgive me," he wrote, "if I disagree with you. I cannot accept your adjective about yourself; since G-d declared 'אתם תהיו לי ממלכת' (Gen. 35:10) – and you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy Nation,' the Creator of the world established that there is no such thing as a chiloni (חילוני), which stems from the word 'mundane' (חול). There just is no such thing; I am sorry; I simply cannot agree with you. You might think that you are earthy and unholy and behave as such; you may just not know any better. But essentially, at your core, you are ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש."

It's a beautiful exchange, but deep down it can feel enigmatic for many of us. "Me? Holy?" we tend to think. "If I were really so special, then I wouldn't struggle with (fill in the blank)." Or, "If it were really true, why does my life feel upside down?"

The truth is, though, that the presence of a "mabul" in one's life – where everything feels overwhelming and one's world is sinking – is not inherently indicative of a problem in oneself. Noach's ark became elevated through the flood, as the waters raised it up higher. Likewise, the ultimate purpose of tension is not to drown the individual, but to advance and heighten him towards untold growth and potential.

Based on Teachings of R' VY Jacobson

"Once you've done everything possible, trust that Hashem will step in and do the impossible."
(R' Shalom Arush)

Pick Your Poison

"Hashem said to Noach: *The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the land has filled with lawlessness because of them; I am about to destroy them with the earth.*"
(Gen. 6:13)

Rashi comments that the people had sealed their fate due to theft; were it not for their sin of robbery, they wouldn't have been destroyed.

The *Siftei Chachamim*, contrasting Rashi with a statement of *Chazal* teaching that it was the sin of immoral conduct that brought about their doom, concludes that it was indeed because of **both** transgressions. To quote: "Were they only to have committed thievery, the decree for destruction would only have been carried out against the wicked, and not the innocent. And were they to only have been acting immorally, the decree wouldn't have been sealed at all – not even against the wicked ones! But because they had both sins on their record, death had been decreed on both the wicked and the innocent."

These words are clearly difficult. Why would it be that having participated in promiscuity alone wouldn't have decreed death even on the wicked? And why was theft, which seems to be less severe, the deal-breaker?

R' Moshe Feinstein offered an astounding explanation. There is stark difference between the sin of theft and that of lewdness. Immorality is of course evil; nevertheless, it does not defy *emuna*. It is possible for a person to have *emuna* in Hashem yet stumble in promiscuity simply because his physical temptations got the better of him. Theft, on the other hand, is in direct defiance of faith in G-d. One with *emuna* knows that sustenance is in Hashem's Hands, and stealing won't actually accomplish anything. Since theft indicates a total lack of belief in Hashem, it is thus a stronger wrongdoing than immorality. That is why the sin of robbery is what sealed the deal.

However, as the *Siftei Chachamim* noted, only the wicked would have been eradicated through theft alone. This is because robbery isn't a sin that would negatively influence others who have *emuna*. For those with a firm belief in G-d, watching others steal wouldn't necessarily entice them to do the same. Hence, there would have been no need to destroy those who were truly innocent. Yet sins such as promiscuity — and others driven by physical desire — carry a uniquely corrosive effect. They rarely remain confined to the individual, for such urges have a way of overpowering even those with deep *emuna*. Thus, when immorality pervades a society, even the seemingly righteous cannot long remain untouched. The "innocent," though not yet guilty in deed, were already in danger of being drawn into the same moral decay. Their fate, therefore, was tragically sealed — not by their own sins, but by the irresistible tide of corruption surrounding them.

We can appreciate from here the power of influence. It is crucial to distance ourselves from negative forces and likewise imperative to chase positive influences that will fill our lives with true happiness, success, and meaning.