

“And Hashem said to Noach: The end of all flesh (i.e. life) has come before Me, for the earth has become filled with corruption, and I will thus destroy them (the creatures) *es ha-aretz*.”
(Bereshis 6:13)

Rashi initially translates the term “*es ha-aretz*” as “from the earth”, meaning that Hashem would obliterate all flesh from the environment in which it was living. However, Rashi then invokes the interpretation of Medrash Bereshis Rabba (31:7), which states that Hashem warned that He would actually destroy some of the earth, for a three-tefach deep section of the earth’s surface—the depth of ground tilled by a plow—was to be melted and tossed about during the Mabul (Flood). Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonasan ben Uziel explain likewise.

The obvious question is why, according to this interpretation, Hashem found it necessary to destroy some of the earth; after all, the earth did not sin.

Rashi (on Bereshis 6:13 and 11:9, from Sanhedrin 108a and Bereshis Rabba 38:6 respectively) explains that the most notable sin of the Dor Ha-Mabul (Generation of the Flood) was Gezel—robbery. It was because of Gezel, representative of a general disrespect and offense toward others, that the Dor Ha-Mabul was more punishable than the Dor Haflaga—the Generation of the Dispersion, which erected Migdal Bavel (the Tower of Babel) in its rebellion against Hashem.

What prompts or permits a person to rob his fellow? Although in individual cases, one may be prone to steal an item which he believes is really his and was wrongfully taken from him, or one may rob out of duress, such as severe poverty, the root of robbery on a general, broad scale is often fallacious entitlement: the robber feels that he is entitled to take as he pleases, for the victim in reality has no rights to his possessions. This is especially true when one feels that he is superior and is therefore more worthy to have the property he takes, or he believes that his territory has been encroached upon by one with no right or a lesser right to be there, such that the robber is free to act as he pleases on “his turf”.

It may be suggested that this was the attitude of the Dor Ha-Mabul. The curse of Adam was that the ground would only yield its produce with much human toil and painstaking effort; Man's mastery over the earth was no more, and -on the contrary -Man became a slave of sorts to the earth. However, this ceased once Noach came onto the scene and the earth's curse was alleviated or lifted. (V. Rashi on Bereshis 5:29, from Medrash Tanchuma.)

Henceforth, Man again experienced and exercised a mastery over the earth and had an extremely heightened feeling of self-esteem, attributing greatness and power to himself, as if he had returned to the level of Adam before his sin and was once more the exclusive dominator of the earth. This self-perception of greatness and control bred a false sense of entitlement, with each person viewing himself as superior and worthy of possessing that which he pleased, each person robbing the other with an air of entitlement to his neighbor's property. One who feels an

exaggerated sense of self-esteem senses no boundaries and is not submissive to authority; thus did the Dor Ha-Mabul also engage in immoral relationships and idolatry. (V. Rashi on Bereshis 6:11, from Sanhedrin 57a.) Each person viewed himself as the master of the terrain, thereby aggrieving his neighbor regarding his property.

It is for this reason that a layer of the earth was destroyed in the Mabul, as the earth served as the vehicle and enabler for Man's erroneous perception of mastery and unbounded greatness, leading to the sins which precipitated the Mabul. The false sense of mastery and entitlement experienced by Man precisely at the time of Noach was a result of Man's ability to again express his domination over the earth; by destroying the earth, Hashem demonstrated and taught that Man's exaggerated perception of greatness was unfounded, as the earth -the source for this attitude -was itself smitten and subject to Divine manipulation.

It is interesting that only the layer of ground which a plow tills was destroyed in the Mabul. This is specifically because Man's mastery over the earth was expressed through the development of farming tools and Man's success at agricultural development; therefore was the section of earth which provided farming Man with an air of superiority obliterated.

Let us glean from Parshas Noach an enhanced appreciation of our own limitations and Hashem's authority over us and the entire universe. Only then may we really be worthy of returning to the pristine state of Adam before his sin.
