

SINS COMMITTED IN PRIVATE ULTIMATELY LEAD TO A VIOLENT SOCIETY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 433, Assisting in a Suicide. Good Shabbos!

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Sins Committed In Private Ultimately Lead To a Violent Society

At the beginning of our parsha, the pasuk [verse] says, "And the earth became corrupt before G-d; and the earth became filled with robbery" [Bereishis 6:11]. If we read this pasuk carefully, we can detect a cause and effect scenario of spiritual decline in the generation that preceded the flood.

The implication of the first part of the pasuk is that the areas where society initially went astray were those areas that were visible only "before G-d". The Talmud [Sanhedrin 57a] specifically links the word used for corruption (hashchasa) in this pasuk to idolatry and sexual immorality (incest and adultery).

The corruption spoken of initially was not all encompassing. It was limited to specific crimes, that for the most part were committed in the privacy of the church or the privacy of one's bedroom. These were crimes that were known only to G-d. But the pasuk continues and says that as a result of these "private/personal" sins, the whole earth became filled with robbery and violence (chamas).

The lesson to be derived here is that immorality that occurs between "consenting adults" in the privacy of their own home DOES affect society. It is not true that I need not be concerned about what happens "behind closed doors". Society will fall apart when violence and corruptions break out into the open. But all of that happens as a direct result of an earlier break down of moral code that occurred only "before G-d."

I am not sure if this lesson would resonate as being self-apparent 100 years ago. However in today's world, one does not need to be a genius to observe in our societal surroundings, the truth that emerges from the above-quoted pasuk.

During the entire year 1940, there were 39 murders in the city of New York. Today those figures have skyrocketed. If a person who lived in New York City in the nineteen forties entered a time warp, and was transported 60 years to New York City today, he would be in for quite a shock. People are afraid to ride the subways. The doors to regular homes are protected with double and triple locks as if every residence was Fort Knox. Our time-warp tourist would see signs in cars "No Radio." He would not be able to figure it out. "Why would someone advertise that he is too poor to afford a radio in his car?"

If, as a society, we would have to suddenly change from life as it was fifty or sixty years ago to what is today, there is no way we would be able to handle it. If we would have told someone in 1940 that he would need a club on his car, his children could not walk to school, he would need all kind of security devices around his home, and he would not be able to ride the subway at night, all of the 'minimal' precautions that are absolutely necessary today - the person would have said, "I can not imagine living in such a society".

But millions of people are still living such a life under exactly these threats and inconveniences. Why? Because the deterioration has been gradual. What has happened since 1940? One of the things that happened is something called "the sexual revolution." People advanced the argument that whatever takes place between consenting adults in the privacy of their own homes is none of anyone else's business. "Doing my own thing does not affect society."

Western Society today is a living proof of the lesson spelled out in the pasuk beginning "And the land became corrupt before G-d." Sins that people perform that may be only visible to G-d Himself, will ultimately affect society such that the earth becomes filled with violence. When people are afraid to walk the street, it is the manifestation of "the earth becomes filled with violence." When it is necessary to have 10 cars per night patrolling residential neighborhoods because people are afraid of gangs and robberies, it is the manifestation of "the earth becomes filled with violence". This all began because of sins committed "only before G-d."

A Comparison Of Two Men and Two Careers

Toward the end of the parsha [reading], the pasuk says, "And Noach, the man of the earth debased himself and planted a vineyard" [Bereishis 9:20]. The Medrash on this pasuk comments that Noach was initially referred to as a righteous man (ish tzadik), but later in life he was referred to as a man of the earth (ish haAdama). The Medrash contrasts Noach's spiritual decline with the spiritual growth of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe was initially called an Egyptian (ish Mitzri) but later in life he was referred to as a man of G-d (ish haElokim).

Moshe's life was a story of spiritual growth. Early in life, people assumed that he was just another Egyptian Prince. But he developed himself and grew into the man of G-d. Noach is introduced to us as a very pious man, the most righteous in his generation. The last we hear of him, however, is that he was a simple farmer who debased himself by getting drunk.

Why did Noach's spiritual career end in relative ignominy? There is another Medrash that addresses this question. The Medrash states that there were three people who became obsessed with land to their spiritual detriment: Kayin, Noach, and Uziyahu. The Medrash says that farming became the primary aspect of Noach's life.

We would not expect Noach to abstain from working the land. He was not living in Gan Eden. He really had no other choice in the matter. He had to make a living. He had to plant. The Medrash is not criticizing Noach for trying to make a living.

But the Medrash is saying that the pasuk is teaching that Noach became so consumed with his career in farming that he was transformed from an "ish tzadik" into an "ish haAdamah". In the final analysis, the land became his raison d'etra.

True, there is nothing wrong with going out to make a living. But, if one lets himself be defined by his profession - Noach "the farmer," rather than Noach the Righteous one - then that is a tragedy.

The Zohar states that Rav Shimon Bar Yochai once met Rav Yossi and he saw that the latter was thinking about worldly matters - non-spiritual things. He chastised Rav Yossi, telling him that he was not the same person who he used to be. Rav Yossi took the chastisement to heart. He refocused his mental energies to Torah and rejoiced in that experience. Rav Shimon Bar Yochai then commented, "the old Rav Yossi I remember has returned."

According to the words of the Zohar, the proof that Rav Yossi returned to his old self was that he "rejoiced in his Torah." The thing that defined him before was his Torah. Torah made him tick. When

he - for a time - got distracted with worldly matters, he lost his focus and *raison d'etra* in life. The proof that he again became 'the old Rav Yossi' was not the fact that he returned to the Beis Medrash (study hall). It was the fact that he rejoiced in his Torah. This became his life, his reason for living. Then, once again he became the Rav Yossi of old.

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