

## לעילוי נשמת

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## SHEM OLAM

In 1931, Rav Reuvein Margolis published his *Shem Olam* — a sefer so remarkable that it merited an extraordinary *haskamah* from the Minchas Elazar. He praised it as a *חיבור נפלא*, that appears to have aligned properly with the thoughts and reasoning of the Tanaaim and Amaroim.

In *Shem Olam*, Rav Reuvein analyzes more than four hundred obscure citations throughout Shas (Bavli and Yerushalmi) and Midrash — in which the text records two Gedolim in dispute, without specifying which Gadol said which statement. (חד אמר וכו' וחד אמר)

With breathtaking mastery, Rav Reuvein applies his encyclopedic knowledge to uncover the authorship behind each of these uncredited statements. By tracing how similar ideas are expressed elsewhere — sometimes repeatedly — by one of the two disputants, he demonstrates who said what. At times his conclusions are so compelling that one wonders why the Gemara itself did not attribute each statement to its correct source. His discoveries not only clarify countless *sugyos* but also open fresh avenues for Torah discussion.

## CHAMAS

At the end of Parashas Bereishis, the Torah describes the moral collapse of

the generation of the Flood — the Dor HaMabul. It states that the people were completely evil (*Bereishis* 6:5).

Rashi (6:13) explains that the decree of the flood was a punishment for the transgressions of immorality, which Rashi notes was being violated by the animals as well (6:12).

However, the Torah uses an interesting word – *chamas* – to describe the final transgression of the people of the *Dor Hamabul* “and the world was filled with *chamas*” (6:11 and 13).

What is the meaning of the word *chamas*? Rashi explains that it means theft. “The decree of the Flood was sealed because of the transgression of theft.” (*Sanhedrin* 108a)

In layman's terms, the final nail on the coffin for the generation of the Flood was the fact that they stole from each other.

It seems striking: their world was steeped in every form of corruption — idolatry, immorality, cruelty — yet it was theft that brought their doom. On the surface, one might think this indicates that theft is graver even than immorality. But Rav Reuvein Margolis shows that the matter is more complex.

## IMMORALITY IS WORSE

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 13a) teaches that one who is not an expert in the laws of marriage and divorce must not rule on such matters, for an error could cause people to live in sin – violating transgressions of immorality. Rav Asi relates that Rav Yochanan said of such a judge: “He is worse for the world than the generation of the Flood.”

The question becomes: Why did Rav Asi choose the generation of the Flood as a backdrop to a conversation regarding a judge knowing the laws of marriage and divorce?

In *Shem Olam* (61), Rav Reuvein explains that the Gemara implies that the sin of



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immorality is even worse than theft. The Flood generation's final sin — the one that sealed their fate — was theft, yet the Gemara declares that one who causes immorality is worse than they. From here, Rav Reuvein deduces that Rav Asi considered immorality the graver transgression.

## THEFT IS WORSE

Rav Reuvein notes that Rav Ami appears to take the opposite view. Rav Ami teaches that droughts are a punishment for theft (*Taanis* 7b) — implying that Rav Ami assumes theft is the worse transgression.

## WHY WINE IS BAD

Rav Reuvein brings these two positions together to illuminate another Gemara in which Rav Ami and Rav Asi argue without attribution.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 74b) discusses the dangers of excessive drinking. Rav Ami and Rav Asi disagree about which sin drunkenness leads to: one says it leads to theft; the other says it leads to immorality.

Since each sage is concerned about the graver sin which drunkenness leads to, Rav Reuvein identifies them based on what he proved was their views elsewhere. Rav Asi — who holds that immorality is worse — must be the one who says wine leads to immorality. Rav Ami — who deems theft worse — must be the one who says wine leads to theft.

## THE FINAL FLOOD

Returning to the Dor HaMabul: the Torah uses the word *chamas* to describe their final corruption, which Rashi interprets as theft. This fits well with Rav Ami's view that theft is the most serious transgression.

But what of Rav Asi? Rav Asi agrees that the word *chamas* is theft. His

comment (in Rav Yochanan's name) that an unworthy judge is “worse for the world than the generation of the Flood,” agrees that the final decree of the Flood was for theft. It adds that the judge's sin of causing immorality is worse still.

Still, this invites a question. Rashi already notes that the generation was steeped in immorality. If so, why was the decree sealed for theft rather than immorality?

There are many approaches as to why the transgression of theft renders society beyond repair, although it is a *less* severe transgression than the transgression of immorality. See Maharsha (*Sanhedrin* 108a).

## CHAMAS MEANINGS

Also, it should be noted that the Midrash offers other interpretations of the word *chamas*.

Rav Levi links the word *chamas* to the transgressions of idolatry and his proof is from our *passuk*. He also connects the word *chamas* to immorality and murder.

Several Rishonim — among them Ibn Ezra, Ralbag, and Abarbanel — explain *chamas* as the abduction of women, (יקחתי וקדחתי גם הנשים בחזקה *Bereishis* 6:2) — thus reading it as an expression of immorality rather than (or together with) theft.

Yet even according to these views, *chamas* may not denote the gravest sin, but the final one — the act that sealed their fate because it renders society beyond repair (like we explained according to Rav Asi).

We hope that Hashem once again applies destruction to those who carry a name like *chamas*, which according to what was stated, represents the tipping point when a society becomes unredeemable.

## רבי ראובן מרגליות

R' Reuvein Margolis (7 Kislev 1889 – 7 Elul 1971) was born in Lemberg (Lvov), Galicia. His first rebbi was his father, who passed away when Reuvein was just 14. He also studied under R' Moshe Mezuzah, whose Torah he eventually published in 1931 as a gesture of gratitude.

At the young age of seventeen, R' Reuvein began publishing Torah thoughts in various newspapers and journals—a passion he maintained throughout his life. Over the next seventy years, he authored dozens of works across an extraordinarily broad range of topics. In Margolis Hayam (p. 70), he mentions a lost manuscript he wrote at the age of eleven on the *sugya* in *Sanhedrin* (33a–b). His first published work, *Toldos Adam* (when he was 22 years old), focused on the Maharsha—not as a traditional biography, but a profound analysis of his methodology and library. The work reflects a complete mastery of the Maharsha's writings across Shas. By 1931, he had already published over twenty works and listed many more he had planned—though sadly, not all survived.

In 1908, at age eighteen, he married Chaya Genendel Shain, who passed away on 27 Sivan 1930 without children. The following year, he published *Nefesh Chaya* in her memory, describing in the introduction how he wrote the *sefer* by candlelight under dire conditions during the Great War. He received a glowing *haskama* from R' Kook. In addition to writing and printing his own works, he published those of others and distributed catalogs through a journal he called *Hamodia*.

In 1912, he received *semicha* from R' Meir Arik. In 1935, he immigrated to Eretz Yisrael and was appointed librarian of the Tel Aviv Library.

When R' Reuvein arrived in Eretz Yisrael in 1935, one of his first visits was to the ailing R' Kook—who, upon hearing his name, made an exception to receive him. According to some accounts, R' Kook was so moved he recited *Shehecheyanu*. He encouraged R' Reuvein to pursue his Kabbalistic writings, recognizing their significance.

R' Reuvein later became renowned for his work in Kabbalah, composing thousands of notes on the *Zohar* and other fundamental mystical texts.

R' Reuvein had no children from either of his marriages—his first wife, Chaya Genendel, and his second wife, Esther (Litwak), who passed away on 26 Cheshvan 1982—but he left behind a vast intellectual heritage treasured to this day.