



Perceptions • Tishrei 25, 5786 • October 25, 2025 • Issue #2119

I CAN'T recall if I noticed this last year or the year before. I also don't remember if I heard it from anyone else, though I find it *very* hard to believe that no one else would have noticed it until now. So, I'll mention it anyhow.

One of the prayers we had been saying (thank God we don't have to anymore) for the hostages was something that we already say regularly as part of Monday and Thursday *Shacharis*: “[As for] our brothers, the entire House of Israel who [still] remain in distress *uvashivia*—and captivity, whether on sea or on land, may God have compassion on them, and bring them from distress to relief, from darkness to light, from servitude to redemption, at this moment, speedily, very soon; and let us say Amen.”

Similarly, the word for “captive” also appears in the Torah here: “*The Canaanite king of Arad...waged war against the Jewish People and took from a shevi—captive*” (*Bamidbar* 21:1). Until recently, that is the word we have used to refer to Jews taken captive, which was once a far too common thing.

Dedicated in loving memory of

Naomi bat Chorshid, a"h.

A modest person, may her *Ne-shamah* have *aliyah* after *aliyah* and may she be a *meilitz yoshar* for all of *Klal Yisroel*, especially at this time of need of the Jewish people.

Shimon & Channah Kedar

But that is not the word you will find used by the media or anyone since October 7, 2023, after Hamas invaded Israel and brutally took captives. The word used was *chatufim* from the word (*lichtoph*), which means to grab something suddenly and forcefully, also correct.

This is the interesting part. In this week's *parsha*, the Torah tells us why God decided to destroy mankind, save Noach, his family, and some of the animals: "*the land was filled with chamas —theft*" (*Bereishis* 6:11). Yes, they were doing all the other things mankind does wrong and which angers God, even the worst of the worst. But, as the commentators point out, stealing from one another seemed to seal the deal on destruction.

We're told a similar thing at the end of *Parashas Ki Seitzei*. First, we were commanded to make sure our weights and balances are just so that we do not cheat anyone. Then, we are commanded to wipe out all memory of Amalek, raising the question, what's the connection between the two?

It is explained that the Torah is indicating what leads to Amalek, our most formidable enemy and national nemesis: stealing. The cardinal sins are cardinal sins, but there is something specific about stealing that represents the breakdown of society and great spiritual vulnerability.

Targum Onkeles's translation of *chamas*? *Chatofim*.

To be clear, there are levels of stealing. The most obvious level is taking someone else's property without permission, even if you intend to later return it. They can even see you do it, but if they do not agree to your possession of their property, it is stealing.

But *halachah* also talks about how gambling wins can also be a form of stealing. People do not gamble to give up their money, but hoping to win. They are only "forced" to part with their

hard-earned cash by the rules of the game. It may be legal by human standards but not necessarily by Heavenly ones.

Gouging can also be a form of stealing by God's standard. Just because we let the marketplace set the price of products does not mean God agrees with that. The marketplace is human-made, human-run, and greed-driven. Does that sound like a just system to decide what is good and bad for society?

I once heard the recording of a well-respected rabbi speaking to, rather, yelling at a conference room of frum lawyers. He was shocked at how many widows and orphans had to forgo proper representation in the courts because they could not afford the fees. It was as if, he cried out, secular standards had replaced Torah values.

One thing is for certain, and that is that we do not appreciate how destructive stealing is to God's world, or how many forms of stealing there are according to Torah. Making money on money is normal and logical, but not necessarily acceptable in Heaven, and when you learn the laws of *ribbis* (interest), it is surprising to see how some of the most seemingly fair transactions fall into the category of the Torah prohibition.

Of course, I am not stating that this was the basis for what happened two years ago and just came to an end (at least for the remaining living captives) this Hoshanah Rabbah. It would take a prophet in touch with God to say that with credibility.

But, we also don't believe in coincidence on any level, and *Parashas Noach* came right after we finally came to terms with what had just occurred that Simchas Torah. The most I can say with any certainty is that it is "interesting." Oh, and, would it hurt to give some thought to how we do business and charge what we do, especially for things people need but might not be able to afford?

At the very least, we'll have less to confess next Yom Kippur, b”
H. At the very best, we can avoid such crises in the future.

Good Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston

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