

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

And you shall not give some of your children to pass through for Molech, so that you not desecrate the name of your G-d; I am Hashem. (18:21)

Chazal (Sanhedrin 64b) derive from here that if someone sacrifices all his children (not just some) to Molech, he is exempt from punishment. What is the logic of this?

The Ramban notes that the Torah calls offering to Molech a desecration of the name of G-d. Furthermore, in Vayikra 20:3 the Torah says, "For he gave some of his children to Molech, in order to defile My Temple and to desecrate My holy name." The meaning, says the Ramban, is that when the nations of the world hear that a Jew sacrificed to Molech and then afterwards went to the Beis Hamikdash and sacrificed to G-d, the name of G-d is desecrated.

Isn't the very act of sacrificing to Molech a desecration of G-d's name? Why does it matter that he also brings offerings in the Beis Hamikdash? The answer is that if someone merely sacrifices to Molech, he is just another one of the millions of idol worshippers in the world. But if he also comes to the Beis Hamikdash, he shows that he fears Hashem and does mitzvos, yet worships Molech as well. That is a true desecration of Hashem's name, because by his conduct he gives the impression that Hashem approves of Molech worship.

For the same reason, Eliyahu Hanavi said (Melachim I 18:21), "Until when will you vacillate between two thoughts? If Hashem is G-d, go after Him, and if the Baal, go after him!" Worshipping only the Baal is preferable to worshipping both Hashem and the Baal, which will confuse and lead astray other Jews.

Accordingly, we understand why one is only punished if he sacrifices some of his children to Molech. If he gives all his children, he is a plain idol worshipper like so many others in the world. But if he sends some children to Molech and others to the Beis Medrash to learn Torah and serve Hashem, it looks like he is a good and righteous Jew, and people will begin to see Molech worship as an admirable thing.

The Torah continues (20:4), "But if the people of the land hide their eyes from this man, when he gives some of his children to Molech..." Why does the Torah call the Jewish people "the people of the land," a term not used anywhere else?

The Gemara (Bava Kama 52a) gives a metaphorical explanation of how Hashem punishes the Jewish people: "When the shepherd is angry at

his flock, he blinds the leader." Rashi explains that there is one goat who knows the way and all the others follow it. When the shepherd is angry at the flock, he puts out the eyes of the leading goat, so that it stumbles into a pit, and all the other goats follow after it. Similarly, when Hashem is angry at the Jewish people, he causes its leaders to be blind.

Rabbeinu Yehonasan, quoted in the Shitah Mekubetzes, explains differently: The shepherd hangs a bell around the neck of a blind goat, making it the leader. All the others follow the sound of its bell, and when it stumbles into a pit, all of them stumble. Similarly, Hashem takes people who are already blind and makes them the leaders of the Jewish people.

Either way, it is the people's fault that the leaders are blind. Accordingly, the translation of our verse would be, "But if the people of the land cause the eyes of the leaders to be hidden from this man..."

Based on this, we can explain an exchange between Yirmiyahu Hanavi and Hashem. Yirmiyahu (14:1-6) received a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem. He responded by praying to Hashem on behalf of the people, "If our sins testify against us, Hashem, act for the sake of Your name...do not abandon us." Hashem said, "Do not pray for the good of this people..." Yirmiyahu said, "Alas, my Lord G-d, behold the prophets say to them, 'You will not see a sword, and you will have no famine, for I will give you true peace in this place.'" Hashem said to him, "The prophets

speak falsely in My name! I did not send them nor command them nor speak to them."

Why did Yirmiyahu bring up the false prophets? The Radak and Metzudas David explain that he meant to defend the people by placing the blame on the false prophets. Because these prophets are constantly telling them that everything will be fine, the people think that their deeds are pleasing to Hashem, and so they continue in their ways.

If so, what was Hashem's answer, "I did not send them"? Yirmiyahu already knew that; he was defending the people on the grounds that they thought the false prophets to be true. The Metzudas David explains that the people should have realized that the prophets were false because they could not prove their credentials with a sign. The Radak says that even if they could perform a sign, the people should have realized that they were false because they advocated idolatry. The Torah (Devarim 13:2-6) teaches that any prophet advocating idolatry is false, no matter what miracles he performs.

But according to the above, we could explain Hashem's answer more simply. Sometimes Hashem does indeed send false prophets to test the Jewish people. Then, if they fail the test, it can be argued that it was not totally their fault. But in this case, Hashem said, "I did not send them as a test. Rather, the people, because of their sins, deserved that their leaders, the prophets, should lead them in the wrong direction. Therefore they cannot be absolved of blame." (Divrei Yoel, pp. 143-148)



**For additional copies of this publication,
or to sponsor an issue,
PLEASE CALL 718-841-7053**

**The True Torah Jews
183 Wilson St. PMB 162
Brooklyn, NY 11211**