

“You shall not present any of your children to pass through for Molech.” (18:21)

The *Bais Hamedrash* of *Horav Yehoshua Tzeitles, z.l.*, was eclectic in nature. Jews from all walks of life felt comfortable entering to ask questions or to have a dialogue with *Rav Yehoshua*. At times, some of the most erudite Christian Bible scholars would come to ask him to elucidate some of the “difficult” passages in the *Torah* and *Chazal*. *Rav Yehoshua* was patient, responding with lucid and penetrating answers to the most complex questions. Once, a Christian scholar asked him about *Chazal’s* commentary to the prohibition of passing one’s child through the deadly fires of the *Molech* idol. *Chazal* state that one incurs the death penalty only if he has passed one of his children through the flames. If he, however, has passed all of his children through, he does not become subject to the death penalty. Why? One would think that the more one does, the greater the sin and, similarly, the punishment.

Rav Yehoshua responded, “Your question is truly troubling. A similar question may be asked in regard to the laws of *Terumah*, a portion of one’s grain that must be separated from his silo and given to the *Kohen*. *Chazal* have not established a set amount to be given for *Terumah*. Indeed, “one stalk of wheat exempts the entire silo from *Terumah*. “If he consecrates the entire silo for *Terumah* however, it is considered nothing, and it does not become *Terumah*. What is the logic behind this ruling? If one kernel is sufficient to exempt an entire field, certainly if one were to relinquish the entire silo for *Terumah*, it should be acceptable.

“Our Sages, in their penetrating wisdom, have taught us a profound lesson with this law,” said *Rav Yehoshua*. “The *Torah* requires a Jew to share with the *Kohen*. To that end, he is to give a portion of his harvest as *Terumah* to the *Kohen*. Some people might give more than others, but, when one gives everything to the *Kohen*, it is considered irresponsible. Such a person, who jeopardizes his family’s financial stability by giving everything away to the *Kohen*, is not completely stable. We do not accept contributions from such a person, since we would only be adding to his emotional insecurity. Likewise, one who sacrifices his child to the *Molech*, as the pagans would do, is considered to be an idol worshiper and should be punished as such. However, one who sacrifices all of his children to the *Molech* is not considered a devoted idol worshiper. He is not an idealist; he should be committed to a home for the criminally insane. We judge only those who are certifiably sane, but nonetheless sin. This person does not fit that standard.”