

Any man from Bnei Yisrael... who shall give of his seed to Molech (Idol) shall be put to death; the people of the land shall pelt him with stones. But if the people of the land avert their eyes from that man when he gives from his offspring to molech, not put him to death – then I shall concentrate My attention upon that man. (20:2,4,5)

Chazal identify a number of ambiguities concerning the *pshat*, explanation, of this *pasuk*. We will focus on two of them. The second *pasuk* states: “But if the people of the land avert their eyes... not to put him to death.” Why are the Jewish people referred to as *am ha’aretz*, “people of the land”? This vernacular suggests that their primary focus is to settle the land. Second; what is the meaning of the phrase “not to put him to death”? Why not simply say: “they will not kill him”?

The *pesukim* concerning the *Molech* debacle are unusually redundant. The *Tevuos Ha’Sadeh*, *Horav Eliezer Deutch*, *zl*, cites the *Ramban* who quotes *Kadmonim* (earlier *Rishonim*) who contend that the *molech* rite consisted of total immolation of the child. The parents actually murdered their child by throwing him in as a sacrifice into the fires of *molech*. The *Ramban* disagrees, contending that the child was merely passed between the fires. He emerged alive – burnt, but alive. The *Tevuos HaSadeh* suggest that perhaps there were two forms of *molech*/two ways to worship *molech*: one in which the child was consumed; and one in which he was only passed through the flames. (In any event, the parents were depraved people. The question is with regard to their level of depravity.)

It goes without question that parents who would murder their child as part of a pagan sacrificial rite are cruel and evil people – individuals who do not belong in a sane society. We have no doubt that their actions bring shame upon a community, and no one would agree to have them as neighbors. Thus, people did not avert their eyes from the offender when witnessing the *molech* rite in which the child was immolated. They would swiftly deal with him on their own. It is the second *molech* rite which causes speculation. Since the child was not killed (what is a little burnt skin?), they might hesitate to intervene, claiming that “we do not want to get involved.” Under such circumstances, Hashem intervenes with His punishment.

The *pesukim* are no longer ambiguous. In the instance that a person gives his child to the *molech*, under such circumstances that – *l’molech mos yumas*, the child will be delivered to the *molech* as a sacrifice, he will surely be executed by his community’s vigilantes. No decent human being will act indifferently to the murder of a child. When the *molech* rite consists of *l’bilti heimis oso*, not to put him to death, however, then Hashem will arbitrate and demand punishment from this man.

Members of a community often remain indifferent to the abuses some parents inflict upon their children. They justify their apathy, claiming that the parents are not inflicting serious bodily harm on

their children. What about emotional abuse? Does anyone know the extent of damage that emotional abuse inflicts upon a child? The scars often accompany the child into adulthood. We must remember that when the community turns its collective heads away from one who passes his child through the fires of the *molech*, Hashem intervenes. He will do the same when a community ignores the cries of those who cannot help themselves. How can we ask Hashem to help our children if we are indifferent to the plight of others?