

# DON'T BE SO HARD ON THE NON-JEWS

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

*They are a generation of reversals, children in whom [proper] upbringing is not [recognizable] in them.*<sup>[2]</sup>

Isolated acts of disobedience can be tolerated, overlooked, or forgiven. Subjects who contravene the will of their sovereign can seek a pardon, sometimes through words alone, and sometimes through a significant gift. On the other hand, should a subject completely deny the authority of his master, he will likely not live long to talk about it.

Our *pasuk* expresses a parallel in the way Hashem deals with His subjects. He has always acted with patience towards all kinds of sins and sinners. He leaves room for all sorts of transgressions and shortcomings, so long as the evildoer holds on to the very idea of a Higher, Supreme Authority. But when children show no sign of proper upbringing, i.e. when a generation loses all connection and belief in the notion of the Divine, it crosses a dangerous line.

Many find it paradoxical that G-d shows so much long-suffering patience. Entire nations show no consciousness of Him, and no regard for His instructions. Yet, they thrive and prosper, often for centuries. Why does he put up with them?

To understand why, we need to think about His expectations of different people. We know what He expects of us. Our full observance of a Torah with 613 commandments makes sense given how He groomed us for it – the careful nurturing of us as a people from the time of the *avos*; the miracles of the Exodus, of the crossing of the Reed Sea, of our survival in the wilderness. More could be expected of us, because He taught us so much more about Himself. He did not, however, do the same to any other nation.<sup>[3]</sup>

At the same time, all the nations whose survival puzzles us believe, in some manner or form, in a Supreme Being. Many get it drastically wrong – but they never distanced themselves from the subservience of Man to a Higher Authority.

Take, for example, some worshipper of a fire-god. His belief is contemptible, of course. But he does believe that the deity he serves is none other than the Creator of heaven and earth. Can he know better? Imagine a king who travels to some distant part of the realm. All his subjects await his arrival with much preparation and anticipation. They line up for hours to position themselves to get a glimpse of the royal entourage. One simple citizen spots a high-ranking official, bedecked in court finery. Thinking that he is the king himself, the commoner prostrates himself before the official,

singing his praise. Will the king have this simple person executed for slighting the honor of the king? Of course not! The king understands that the enthusiasm was meant for him, and that it was directed to the wrong place because of mistaken identity. Moreover, he understands that because the citizen never saw or had any relationship with the king, the mistake was an excusable one.

Similarly, HKBH is not bothered by many people whose limited discernment and foolish theology lead them to worship idols and icons, believing that they are the Being that created heaven and earth. Moreover, among those people are individuals who act in an exemplary manner towards their fellow man. Is it conceivable that a just G-d will not reward them for their good works? We note the existence of countries from one end of the world to the other, where no one knows about the Jewish people or their Torah. Will the otherwise righteous individuals in those places be punished for their ignorance, which comes through no fault of their own? About such people, the *navi* says, "The righteous shall live by his faith,"<sup>[4]</sup> meaning that the well-being of righteous Gentiles is sustainable through their faith in a Supreme Being.

Very different are those who have given up such belief entirely. They are contemptible, have no ready excuse, and do not enjoy Hashem's patience. This was true of the people of Sodom, and of the generation of the Flood. Both of these had cashiered traditional belief, and lived without a divine Creator. So did many of the inhabitants of the Land at the time of Yehoshua's conquest; that is why they had to be eliminated.

The children of our *pasuk* are Jews who have similarly embraced the same despicable belief system that has no room for a Supreme Being. Hashem accordingly warns of harsh treatment that will come their way.

1. Based on *Melech Machsheves* by R. Moshe Cheifetz, 1663-1711.
2. Devarim 32:20.
3. As remarkable as the *mechaber's* development of this thought is, there is an earlier parallel in *Akeidas Yitzchok*, Shaar 88.
4. Chabakuk 2:4.