

THE DESECRATION OF MOLECH: WE WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR PRIORITIES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Acharei Mos

The Desecration of Molech: We Will Be Held Accountable For Our Priorities

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion. Good Shabbos!

The end of Acharei Mos contains the prohibition of giving one's children over to the pagan worship of Molech. This tragic form of Avodah Zarah [idolatry] involved transferring one's child to the priest of Molech, who would then pass the child through fire as an act of worship to the pagan god. In some forms of this worship the child would in fact be burnt to death. The Torah pasuk that prohibits this act says, "...that you will not thereby profane the Name of your G-d, I am HaShem." [Vayikra 18:21]. In other words, beyond the intrinsic prohibition of the idolatry involved, there is another prohibition, that of Desecrating the Name of G-d (Chillul HaShem).

The Ramba"n elaborates on the unique desecration of G-d's name that accompanies worship of Molech. The Ramba"n explains that it will be a Chillul HaShem when the nations will hear that Jews honor their G-d by offering animal sacrifices, but that they honor Molech by offering their children.

Rav Dovid Kviat (in his Sefer Succas Dovid) observes that this concept -- that a person can cause a Chillul HaShem by showing greater homage and honor to some other area in life than to the Master of the World, is a phenomenon which is far less foreign to us than the cult of Molech.

In the book of Shmuel we learn of the capture of the Aron HaBris [Ark of the Covenant] by the Plishtim [Philistines]. The Aron remained with the Plishtim for a certain period of time and caused havoc to them, such that they sent it back to Israel. Initially, upon its return to Israel, a plague occurred in Israel as well, smiting the residents of Beis Shemesh [Samuel I Chapters 4-6]. The Medrash asks why the residents of Beis Shemesh were punished. The Medrash answers that they had been more worried when their hens were lost than when the Aron was captured. This is a terrible criticism and a terrible Chillul HaShem.

This is the same type of Chillul HaShem that the Ramba"n identifies with Molech worship. It is the same type of Chillul HaShem in which we all unfortunately engage, to a greater or lesser extent, when we do not demonstrate the proper priorities in terms of manifesting our care and concern.

The transmission of our car breaks. This upsets us. We come back from a vacation and find that the refrigerator stopped working and all the food is ruined. The house stinks. Everyone gets upset! Little things like this upset us.

The difficult situation in Eretz Yisroel should upset us far more than life's trivialities, about which we get so worked up. Every day's curse is worse than the previous day's curse. The situation there is terrible. But does it bother us more or less than if our refrigerator breaks? Does it bother us more than a transmission?

What bothers us? What makes us upset? What makes us lose sleep at night? G-d was upset at the people of Israel for being more concerned about a hen than about the Aron. We read the Medrash with disdain for the people of Beis Shemesh. We think, how could they be more concerned about a chicken than about the Aron! But we need to look in the mirror and ask ourselves -- are we more worried about our own businesses and our own refrigerators and transmissions and all the other trivialities of life, than we are with what is going on with Klal Yisroel?

To be more worried about the former than the latter is in effect the admonition mentioned in this week's parsha: "And you shall not desecrate the Name of your G-d, I am HaShem". G-d holds us accountable for our priorities - how we treat Him and how we treat other things.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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