

## נצבים

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### THE SINS OF THE FATHER

פן יש בכם איש או אשה או משפחה או שבט אשר לבבו פנה  
היום מעם ה' אלקינו ללכת לעבד את אלהי הגוים ההם פן-  
יש בכם שרש פרה ראש ולענה

If there be among you man, or woman, or family,  
or tribe, whose heart is turned away today from  
Hashem to go to serve the gods of those nations; if  
there be among you a root that is fruitful in gall and  
wormwood (*Devarim 29:17*).

Rashi (*ibid.*) interprets this *pasuk* to mean that there may be those among us who would reject Hashem's covenant, like a root that develops into a grass as bitter as wormwood. And like this bitter grass, these people would spread their wickedness. Ibn Ezra (*ibid.* 29:15,17) points out that there were those among *Klal Yisrael* who witnessed the idolatry of Mitzraim and they might have come to influence and damage the rest of *Klal Yisrael*. The Ramban (*ibid.*) further explains that wickedness can be nurtured dormant for several generations, after which it can sprout anew.

It is fascinating to note that nowhere in the Torah do we find any direct mention of idolatry regarding the generations of Mitzraim. Except for this oblique reference by Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the only other *pasuk* linking the generations of Mitzraim with *avodah zarah* — idol worship — was made in the *Nevi'im* by Yechezkel *Hanavi* about seven hundred years later.

כי אחרי גוליהם לבם הלך

For their hearts went after their idols (*Yechezkel*  
20:16).

Regarding the generation of the *midbar*, Yechezkel states:

ואחרי גלולי אבותם היו עיניהם

and their eyes were after their fathers' idols (ibid. 24).

Then, with respect to the generations living in *Eretz Yisrael*, including Yechezkel's own generation, he thundered:

אתם נטאים לכל גלויכם

You pollute yourselves with all your idols (ibid. 31).

Yechezkel was castigating the few members of his generation who were involved in idolatry. He was searching for the root of this evil in their forefathers. Hence, in retrospect, Yechezkel blamed the generation of Mitzraim for their offspring's misdeeds. Although the generations of Mitzraim and the *midbar* were not uniformly involved in idol worship — they remained passive regarding it (*Yoma* 66:). They observed idols being worshipped and did nothing about it. They gave credence to the philosophy “live and let live.” The fact that they tolerated idolatry was the seed which sprouted several hundred years later in their offspring in the form of actual idolatry.

This is the “root” which Moshe *Rabbeinu* was referring to. His prophecy that it would be “fruitful in gall and wormwood” referred to the culmination of years of tolerating idol worship, which resulted many generations hence in actual *avodah zarah*.

When it comes to Hashem's commandments not only is observance essential, but letting others transgress is as punishable as non-observance. A Jew may not sit by complacently while Hashem's precepts are being violated. The greatness of Pinchas (*Bamidbar* 25:11) was that he could not permit an insult to Hashem to go unanswered. He was a *kana'i* — one jealous for Hashem's dignity. He felt obligated to respond to an outrage against Hashem, even when the general opinion of the Sages differed from his (*Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 48:). He could not remain tolerant,

indifferent, while a transgression was being committed, hence he was rewarded with eternal recompense (*Bamidbar*, *ibid.* 25:13).

כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה

We have a policy that all of *Klal Yisrael* is responsible for each other (*Shevuos* 39•).

Each Jew is responsible for the acts and behavior of his fellow Jew. If one observes his neighbor acting improperly or violating Hashem's laws, it is his duty to correct the wrong. This policy was only inaugurated in the era of Yehoshua, when *Klal Yisrael* entered *Eretz Yisrael*. It was publicized when a lone individual, Achan, illegally took of the spoils of Yericho, but the entire nation was held culpable (*Yehoshua* 7:22). Nevertheless, this principle might have been operative for individuals of high standards prior to this. That is why Pinchas felt obligated to act in Hashem's behalf during the *Dor Hamidbar*; and that is why both Moshe and Yechezkel blame the *Dor Mitzraim* for their children's iniquities.

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