

“When a nasi/ ruler sins.” (4:22)

In the *Talmud Horiyos* 10b, *Chazal* make an intriguing statement. They say that the word *asher* alludes to *ashrei*, fortunate. This implies that the generation whose leader seeks atonement, even for his inadvertent sins, is truly a fortunate one, for he will repent his intentional sins. We must understand the good fortune in having a ruler that sins – because he becomes a model of someone who repents his sins. *Horav Elimelech, z.l., m’Lishensk*, gives the following explanation: *Klal Yisrael* is comprised of *tzaddikim*, righteous, pious Jews, and also *peshutei ha’am*, common, simple Jews. Due to the vast spiritual dichotomy between the two, it is almost impossible for the *tzaddik* to come close to the common Jew. How is he to know and to be sensitive to the common Jew? How is he to know and be sensitive to the common Jew’s brokenhearted feelings when he sins? How is he to help him, if he has never experienced the feeling of dejection that comes with a spiritual failing; the feelings of spiritual inadequacy that one feels when he has fallen short of his expected goal?

Hashem causes the *tzaddik* to fall prey inadvertently to a minor infraction. He sustains a spiritual setback. During this moment of shortcoming, the *tzaddik* can sensitize himself to the pain and anguish that accompanies the common Jew during his period of frailty. The *sefer, Chaim Sheyeish Bahem*, cites the *Tanna D’bei Eliyahu* which offers a powerful analogy. A simple maidservant lost her inexpensive, earthenware pitcher in a well. Due to her inability to retrieve it, she gave up hope of ever seeing it again. Afterwards, the princess went to that well and lost her gold pitcher there. When the maidservant heard this, she was overjoyed. She knew that the princess would instruct her servants to look into the well in order to retrieve her pitcher. Once they were looking for the gold pitcher, they would also recover the maidservant’s pitcher.

The *Steipler Rav, z.l.*, once attended the *bar mitzvah* of a boy who was totally unknown to him. The great sage was ill at the time and had not left his house for quite a while. It was, therefore, very surprising to everyone that he attended this *simchah* – especially since he had no connection to the family. What was even more astonishing was that when the *Steipler* entered the hall, he went straight over to the *bar mitzvah* boy and asked to speak to him privately. One can imagine that this caused quite a stir.

After the *Steipler* left, the boy was asked what had occurred in the room. The boy was so overcome with emotion that all he could respond was, “He came to ask me for *mechilah*, forgiveness.” Later it was discovered that six years earlier, when the boy had been seven-years-old, he was attending the same *shul* that the *Steipler* frequented. One day, during *davening*, the *Steipler* noticed the boy learning when he should have been *davening*. The *Steipler* proceeded to go over and admonish the young boy for not paying proper attention to his prayers. After all, when one has an “appointment” to speak with the Almighty, he should not drift away and study. There is a time and place for everything. Afterwards, the *Steipler* discovered that the boy’s *Siddur* was set up in the form of a *Gemora*. Actually, the boy was *davening* – not learning. The sage was despondent that he had wrongly hurt the child’s feelings. Since the boy was *halachically* a *katan*, a minor, asking

forgiveness would be to no avail. He waited six years, until the boy turned *bar mitzvah*, to ask for *mechilah*!

“Fortunate is the generation whose *tzaddikim* repent for their ‘inadvertent’ sins!”