

When a ruler sins. (4:22)

Rashi explains the word *asher*, as related to *ashrei*, fortunate: “Praised/fortunate is the generation whose leader is bold/courageous enough to offer penance/*korban*/offering for his *shegagah*, inadvertent sin; *kal v'chomer*, how much more so, if he is prepared to show remorse/ regret over his willful sin.” It is a rare leader who does not conceal his error, who does not hide behind his exalted office, often denying that he committed an error in judgment or had a lapse in his spiritual relationship with Hashem, one who proclaims, *Chatasi*, “I have sinned.” This is unfortunately a rare phenomenon, but this alone is reason to underscore the good fortune of a generation which has such a leader. This leader is not arrogant or pompous, does not blame his mistakes on everyone else but himself, the perpetrator of the misdeed. He is a human being – and human beings occasionally err.

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, observes that one would expect such laudatory/recognition in a corrupt generation whose leadership is selected, not on the basis of their Torah erudition or fear of G-d, but on “connections” and “pull.” One might suspect that a leader whose Torah and *yiraas Shomayim* is, at best, elementary, and, for the most part, lacking, to be one who would camouflage his misdeeds. This is not unexpected when one’s character is far from praiseworthy. Thus, one who breaks from the pack, acts remorseful and seeks penance, should be commended. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, notes, however, that *Rashi* implies that arrogance and cover-up are not unknown in a generation whose congregants are impeccable in their *yiraas Shomayim* and whose leadership are the products of an exhaustive search for one whose erudition matches his unsurpassed *yiraas Shomayim*. Would such a person be the victim of arrogance? Could he fall prey to concealing his spiritual deficiency? Apparently, even the best of the best are human, and, as such, fear humiliation. Thus, a generation whose leadership declares his guilt is truly fortunate.

Hashem selected *Shaul Ha'Melech* to be our people’s first king. This appointment was indicative of his spiritual excellence. Yet, his extraordinary humility was insufficient to protect him from his own human nature, which did not allow him to confess to his shortcomings. The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites *Eliyahu Rabbah* (31:13) that refers to Shaul as being guilty of *gasus ruach*, thickness of spirit (arrogance), a deep desire to be someone of significance. On the other hand, we find the *Navi* excoriating Shaul for his misplaced humility, referring to him as *nechba el ha'keilim*, hiding behind the vessels (*Shmuel I*, 10:22). Clearly, Shaul was righteous and humble but this, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, does not necessarily obviate him from declaring, “I listened to the voice of Hashem,” when, in fact, he did not (*Shmuel I*, 15:20). Clearly, on Shaul’s exalted spiritual level, the slight tinge of impropriety was viewed as a sin, thus we see the reference to him being guilty of *gasus ha'ruach*. This shows us that, regardless of a person’s stature, confessing to a wrong, however slight, takes much spiritual and emotional character.

Perhaps we might be able to explain Shaul’s actions by distinguishing between *gaavah*, haughtiness, and *gasus ha'ruach*, thickness of spirit. The fellow who is plagued by *gasus ha'ruach* seeks significance, wants to be relevant, independent of Hashem. Arrogance, on the other hand, is

the feeling that one has actually made it; he has achieved significance. Thus, the one who is plagued with *gasus ha'ruach*, passions for what he has convinced himself he must have, while the *baal gaavah* has what he thinks is important. He thrives on being relevant and being the object of public adulation – regardless of whether it is all external. He is convinced that he is special. This is all that counts.

Let us address the opposite side of the coin. One who is humble neither ignores his fine attributes, nor negates his achievements and potential. He knows what he is and what he is capable of doing. It just does not mean that much to him. “So what?” he will reply to those who laud his accomplishments. In *Chabad Chassidus*, this feeling is called a lack of *hargashas atzmo*, feeling of self. He is neither absorbed in nor conscious of himself. He acts, does what he is supposed to do – and moves on with life. He neither stops to pat himself on the back, nor pines for adulation.

Gasus ha'ruach leads one to depression and disillusionment when he does not obtain what he is seeking. A person who has developed his *middas ha'anavah*, attribute of humility, does not allow for extraneous issues that pull so many people down to affect him. He remains *b'simchah*, filled with joy, because what he might not have, the accolades that mean so much to his counterpart, mean nothing to him.

Shaul *Ha'Melech's* humility was contrived of melancholy and despair resulting from the *gasus ha'ruach* that affected him. (We must underscore that the use of these terms about a *tzaddik* of the level of *Shaul Ha'Melech* are used only relative to his exalted spiritual stature.) Shaul sought significance and, when he felt it was not forthcoming, he fell into despair which, for all outward appearances, manifested itself as humility. One who is truly humble is filled with *simchah*, because he has no cares to bring him down. One whose *anavah* is the result of *gasus ruach* is plagued by *atzvus*, despondency, because he feels that what he is seeking eludes him. Shaul *Ha'Melech* was not guilty of arrogance. As the *Eliyahu Rabbah* teaches, he was plagued with *gasus ha'ruach*. Regardless of his achievements, he was dissatisfied, because he wanted more.

Some people live for attention – because they not only thrive on it, but they need it to live. Without a feeling of relevance and significance, they become despondent. Sad, but that is the human nature of those who are plagued with a thickness of spirit. We should focus and learn from those who truly would do anything not to garner public adulation and fanfare. No dearth of stories describes the sincere modesty manifest by our Torah leaders. It seems as if the greater they were, the greater their demureness. Their unpretentiousness was real. The *Rachmastrivka Rebbe, zl*, was unique in his saintliness. At one point, he was in excruciating pain in his arm. It had become infected, and his doctors were concerned that the infection would spread. He exercised his arm as per his doctor's orders in order to loosen up the muscles and increase blood flow. He was informed that *chamei Teveryah*, the hot springs at Teveryah, would heal him. The *Rebbe* absolutely refused to travel to Teveryah for therapeutic purposes.

When asked why he was so reluctant to take the trip, he explained, “When I announce that I am

leaving, a crowd of *chassidim* will gather on the day of my journey to *gezegen zich*, say goodbye to me. When I return, they will come again, gather and wait in line to welcome me home. It is not worth it for me to take leave of my *chassidim* if this is what is involved. I cannot put my *chassidim* through such an “ordeal.” When they convinced the *Rebbe* that they would see to it that no one would “alter his schedule,” he acquiesced to go.