

“If the anointed Kohen will sin, bringing guilt upon the people... If the entire assembly of Yisrael shall err...it is a sin-offering of the congregation. When a ruler sins...” (4:3,13,21,22)

Three sins are mentioned: the Kohen Gadol sins; the Sanhedrin err in halachah; the Nasi or king sin. Regarding the first two sins, the Kohen Gadol and Sanhedrin, the Torah begins with the word “im”, if (he/they sin). When the Nasi sins, the Torah writes “asher,” when (he sins). Why is there a change in the Torah’s wording regarding the Nasi? The Meshech Chochmah opines that the phrase, “asher nasi yecheta”, “when a Nasi/ruler sins”, is connected to the words that precede it, namely, “Chatas ha’kahal hu,” “it is a sin-offering of the congregation.” In other words, the ruler’s sin is catalyzed by the congregations’ failing. In contrast, the Kohen Gadol’s sin is l’ashmas ha’am, to the guilt of the people; his sin precedes that of the people. He is responsible for their error.

The Torah is teaching us a significant lesson concerning the Kohen Gadol, the spiritual leader’s relationship vis-à-vis his flock, as opposed to the relationship of the king, the civil sovereign, with the people. The Kohen Gadol is the mashpia ruchoni, the spiritual advisor, who inspires and infuses Klal Yisrael with spirituality. He guides, he directs, he oversees the spiritual development of Klal Yisrael. He must divest himself of physical/material responsibility and endeavor to focus himself solely in the realm of the spiritual dimension, so that he can refine himself to the point that he fulfills his function as spiritual leader. When he errs and transgresses, it has an overriding, tragic effect on the people who look up to him for guidance and inspiration.

In contrast, the Nasi, king, governs in a secular sense. He oversees the physical/material/civil/social/development of the people. It is necessary that his office reflect the outer trappings of his position. This can cause a problem if the secular accoutrements that his office mandates affect his mindset and behavior. Indeed, this is why the Torah has put into place specific commands and guidelines to circumvent this problem. There are limitations placed on the wealth; the number of horses, and amount of silver and gold the Jewish king may amass.

While ostensibly the melech Yisrael, Jewish king, must be an individual of noble spiritual stature and repute, the Torah does not demand him to be the spiritual advisor and leader of the Jewish People. On the contrary, he needs the support of the people to maintain his spiritual status. The Torah alludes to them by the juxtaposition of the words, “it is a sin-offering of the congregation,” to the words, “when a ruler sins,” detailing the ruler’s sin. They are both intrinsically involved; the king sins when the people are spiritually deficient. When our secular leadership act inappropriately, first and foremost we must look into ourselves. It is not the leadership’s function to deal with the spiritual ills of the community. It is up to the people, together with their spiritual leadership, to address the areas of concern. The relationship between the community and its leadership goes in

both directions.