

## When a ruler sins and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done – unintentionally. (4:22)

The other *pesukim* (addressing private and communal sin) begin with the logical *v'im*, if (someone sins). Concerning the *Nasi*, the Torah begins with the word *asher*, which means when (a *Nasi* sins). Why, concerning everyone else, it is “if” and regarding the *Nasi*, it is “when”? It is almost as if the Torah is implying that, for the *Nasi*, sin is inevitable. It is only a question of when it will occur. *Rashi* quotes the *Sifra* that teaches that the word *asher* alludes to *ashrei*, fortunate, implying that a generation whose leader sins and seeks atonement for his error is truly fortunate. A leader who does not hide behind his cloak of power, who is prepared to come clean and seek atonement for his unintentional indiscretions, will surely repent his intentional sins. We wonder whether having a leader who concedes his unintentional sins is better than a leader who does not sin at all. One would think that a leader who is free and clear of all transgressions – both unintentional and intentional – would be the kind of leader a generation would be fortunate to have. Why settle for second choice?

*Horav Sholom Shachne Zohn, zl* (quoted by *Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk*) related an exposition he heard from *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl*. When a generation has a leader who never errs, never sins, this can be attributed to either of two reasons: 1) The leader is that good, that circumspect, that careful that he does not commit an unintentional sin. 2) The leader does very little. He rubber stamps what his congregation wants. He never takes a stand, never takes the initiative, never goes on the offense for fear that he might lose support. A leader who does nothing cannot really err. (The second reason sadly occurs more often than we care to admit.)

One of the *gedolei ha'mussar*, Ethicists, analogized this in the following manner. A person attending a wedding was asked to pour wine for the participants sitting at his table. He replied, “I refuse to pour wine for the guests.” When he was queried for a reason, he responded, “I am afraid of spilling wine on the tablecloth.” Those who heard his reply looked at him incredulously, “What is so bad if you spill a little wine? That is what tablecloths are for.”

This man was overly careful, and perhaps he should be commended for his caution. Not pouring the wine, however, is taking caution too far. His non-action borders on absurdity. A well-known quote (secular), “Your job is to achieve greatness, not to avoid mistakes.” Errors are normal; people are often stressed, especially if they are under pressure. If they do nothing, however, they might not make mistakes, but they will have made the mistake of not doing anything.

This, explains *Rav Chaim Ozer*, is why a generation whose leader offers a *korban* for his unintentional sin is fortunate. The sin came as a result of his seeking to do, to achieve, to create for his community. He does not sit back ensconced in his ivory tower fearing what could result from his error. He acts, and, come what may, he knows that he had made every attempt to help those who

rely on him.

*Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl (Ayeles HaShachar)* notes the language of *Rashi's* commentary, "The word *asher* here is related to *ashrei*, fortunate. Fortunate is the generation whose ruler sets his heart (*nosein lev*) to bring an atonement for his unintentional sins." *Rashi* lauds neither the *Nasi's* bringing the *korban*, nor his courage in not concealing his error. Rather, *Rashi* underscores the fact that he set his heart to introspect and examine himself, to correct his ways and repair his error.

*Rav Turk* explains this meaningfully. By his very nature, man refuses to accept responsibility. It is always someone else who is responsible for his oversight. Thus, whenever an error occurs, he will convince himself that it is not his fault. He will find every reason to justify his actions. *Teshuvah* is comprised of introspection, such that it does not allow for ambiguity and cover up. The *Nasi* has every excuse to project his unintentional guilt onto others. He carries enormous responsibility on his shoulders. Thus, he has numerous venues on which to lay blame. The leader who is man enough to accept responsibility and not seek a way to expunge his guilt by blaming it on someone or something else is truly a great ruler – one that the generation is fortunate to have.

A great leader whom the generation is privileged to have at its helm is one who, not only does not conceal his errors, but one who actually searches for any perceived failing in his behavior. He will not leave any stone unturned in his self-examination. *Rav Turk* relates an incredible incident which occurred with *Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, Mashgiach* of Ponovezh, Mir and Kletsk. The *Mashgiach* was a *Levi*, and, as such, is enjoined to wash the hands of the *Kohanim* prior to *duchaning*, blessing of the congregation. Despite the fact that *duchaning* occurs at the end of *Mussaf*, the *Mashgiach* was unable to participate in this noble endeavor because he was reciting *Shemoneh Esrai*. On *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, however, due to the lengthy *piyutim*, liturgy, he was able to complete his recital of *Shemoneh Esrai* in time. He had one stipulation. He would only wash the hands of the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl, Ponovezher Rav*.

*Rosh Hashanah Mussaf* everyone, *Kohanim* and *Leviim*, lined up to participate in this pre-*duchaning* ritual. *Rav Turk*, who was a young boy at the time (he had accompanied his father), noticed that, while there were many *Leviim* assembled by the water faucets, in a corner he saw a solitary *Kohen* and a solitary *Levi*. This piqued his curiosity. After all, what made them different? He moved closer to see. When he saw who it was, he also wanted to wash the *Rav's* hands. (*Rav Turk* is a *Levi*.) He went over and was about to pick up a cup when the *Mashgiach* said, "Nu, nu!" and shooed him away.

The *Mashgiach* was distraught that perhaps he had hurt the young boy's feelings. He went over to *Rav Turk's* father and begged his forgiveness. He asked him to apologize to his son – which, of course, he did. Nonetheless, the *Mashgiach* could not rest. He worried lest he had hurt a young boy's feelings. On *Yom Kippur*, as the *Mashgiach* walked over to the faucet, he stopped at (young) *Rav Turk's* seat and motioned to him to come along. The *Mashgiach* filled the cup with water and

signaled to *Rav Turk* to hold the cup with him, and together they washed the *Rosh Yeshivah's* hands. This was all because he might have slighted a young boy and hurt his feelings. Concerning such a leader, the Torah asserts, *Ashrei hador*, "Fortunate is the generation."