

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

*Asher* can be translated as “when,” indicating the inevitability of the ruler’s unintentional sin. It often comes with the territory. Power and wealth make great demands on a person, and sometimes a ruler is distracted or overwhelmed by the stress of his role. *Rashi* cites *Sifra* that translates *Asher* as alluding to *Ashrei*, fortunate. This implies that the generation whose leader does not resort to cover-up or spin to validate his actions – who concedes that he has erred – is truly a fortunate generation. This is a leader whom we can respect. His integrity is more important to him than his ego. A leader who admits to his errors displays courage and devotion to Hashem. Ultimately, he will probably achieve even greater respect when people recognize his authenticity and sincerity.

During one of his trips, the wagon driver who was transporting the *Chafetz Chaim* complained about the weariness of his life. His horse, which was the source of his livelihood, fell. The people of his community made a collection, so that he could purchase another horse. He now had a horse, but no customers. “*Rebbe!* Why is God making life miserable for me?” he asked.

“Apparently, you are not acting appropriately,” the *Chafetz Chaim* said. “Are you careful with regard to *mitzvos* between man and his fellow man? Do you state a price for a trip and, in the middle of the journey, when the customer is vulnerable, raise the price? Do you graze your horse in other people’s fields? Probably, Hashem has pity on you, punishing you in this world, so that you will not be punished in the next world.”

“Well, if the *Rebbe* is so perfect, why is it that his fur jacket was stolen from him in Vilna?” the wagon driver asked the sage. The *Chafetz Chaim* replied, “Do you think that I am righteous? I also have sins in the area of monetary relations. I sell my *sefarim* all over. While I do my best to check every single page for perfection, in some instances, when a page is bent or torn and the purchaser is embarrassed to tell me, they swallow the loss. It is for such ‘imperfections’ on my part that Hashem punishes me.”

*Chazal* teach that a person’s *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, coincides with his own distinction. One who is a *tzaddik* has to overcome the wiles of a much more powerful *yetzer hara* than his friend who is not yet distinguished. Human nature requires overcoming challenges. *Rav* Nosson Nota of Chelm (*Talmid* of *Horav* Elimelech of Lizhensk, who assumed leadership of his *Rebbe*’s *Chassidim* following his passing) was known to say: “The *Roshei teivos*, first letters of ‘*Asher Nasi Yecheta*,’ *Aleph, Nun, Yud*, make up the word *ANI*, I. The sin of the *Nasi*, ruler, is to relinquish his obsession with this *ANI*, me. His arrogance brings about his downfall.

The power to overcome self-concern and confess to a spiritual failing – even unintentional – is

bequeathed to us from Yehudah ben Yaakov *Avinu*. He realized that he had been responsible for *Tamar's* condition, and he confessed publicly, realizing that, for someone of his lofty stature, it would be a disgrace. Apparently, it did not change his stature. Proof positive that it was he whom *Yaakov Avinu* sent to establish the first *yeshivah* in *Goshen* – not Reuven or Yosef or Yissachar, or Levi. Yehudah proved that he had what it takes to be a Torah leader. He was prepared to say, "I erred."

At times, the confession need not address anything negative. It is possible that the leader wanted to do something positive, more demanding, more elevating, but he failed in reaching his self-imposed goal. This, too, takes courage to concede. A certain *Rebbe* would listen to the problems of those who came to see him. They sought his advice, they petitioned his blessing. When they left, the *Rebbe* would break down and cry. His *gabbai* asked, "Why is the *Rebbe* crying?"

"I cry because I am unworthy," the *Rebbe* said. "These people that come to me are holy, precious *Yidden*. I cannot bring myself, however, to love them as much as I love my children – and that's wrong."

This holy man understood the importance of connecting with others, of feeling their pain. He was well aware that people require love – they must feel loved. He was upset with himself that he could not give them what they needed. They probably did not know this, but he did; thus, he cried. He may not have reached his goal of love, but he certainly fulfilled the ideal of *Asher Nasi Yecheta*. He refused to cover up his "failing."