

TRICKLE DOWN THEORY

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The process of sinning and repenting ascends to a different level in this week's portion. In addition to the regular steps of penitence, the Torah commands that the sinner must bring a *korban*, an animal sacrifice to atone for his sin. This ritual encompasses many deep philosophical and psychological ramifications that are discussed in detail by the great thinkers of the 12th century, among them Rambam, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra. After all, the concept of sacrificing living things is quite difficult to understand, especially in the context of a Torah that is so demanding regarding the treatment of animals that it prohibits humans to eat a meal *before* their animals have been fed!

Yet the laws of sacrifice are not limited to simple sinners. The law applies to the rich and poor, the weak and the mighty, and even to the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) himself.

The Torah tells us that when the *Kohen Gadol* sins, he too must bring an offering. Although the Torah is detailing the ramifications of the *Kohen Gadol's* individual transgression, it mentions the sin of the nation too: "If the anointed *Kohen Gadol* will sin, bringing guilt upon the people" (*Leviticus 4:3*).

Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Sforno, three of the most famous Torah commentators, all comment on the strange juxtaposition of the nation and the *Kohen Gadol*. "After all," they ask, "what connection do the people have to the *Kohen Gadol's* sin?" Why is *his* sin considered "bringing guilt upon the people"?

Dr. George Fordyce Story, was a prominent English physician in the latter part of the 18th Century. Despite his medical skills, he unfortunately possessed a major flaw - he was a heavy drinker. During a dinner at which he was quite inebriated, Dr. Fordyce was urgently summoned to tend to a distinguished person who had taken ill with unspecified symptoms.

Far from sober, Dr. Story had great difficulty locating the patient's pulse or even counting the beats. Frustrated and realizing his *own* condition, he muttered to himself, "Drunk, by golly!" and then proceeded to write a prescription.

The next morning Dr. Story received an official looking letter from his patient. He expected it to contain a stern rebuke for his inadequate doctoring the preceding night. It did not. Inside was a short note: "I, too, am aware of the sorry state I was found in yesterday evening - I am sure that you will keep your evaluation confidential." Enclosed was a 100 pound sterling note.

Perhaps the Torah is teaching the *Kohen* and us a lesson in human nature. When the people see the *Kohen* bringing a *korban*, they may feel that *they* too have sinned. A sense of guilt will fall upon the

entire nation. And when he says the words of repentance, albeit quietly unto himself, the feeling of the people will be that they too are at fault. It is important for good leaders to know that their deeds affect the standard of their community. When they rise, so does their flock. Moreover, when, Heaven forbid, they fall, the nation falls with them. It is their duty to understand that they do not operate in a vacuum. Whatever they do, or whatever they say, trickles down to the people.

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