

# LEADERS - REFLECTION OF THE PEOPLE

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"If the Anointed Priest shall sin, to the guilt of the people..." [4:3]*

Many commentators question the connection. Each person, of course, is liable for his or her own actions. How can it be, then, that the Torah refers to a sin of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, as "to the guilt of the people?" How are they to blame for his mistake?

Rabbi Dovid Feinstein finds the answer not in the action itself, but in the environment surrounding it. We do not operate in a vacuum, and thus a leader is a reflection of his followers.

If the High Priest sins, the people may follow. Each person can and may say, "if he, our Holy Man, cannot control himself, how can I be expected to do any better?" And from the opposite direction, if the people behave poorly, then it is difficult for an individual to rise above them and to perfect his or her ways.

One way or the other, "to the guilt of the people" is entirely appropriate. Jewish sources not only here, but throughout the Talmud and commentaries, reject the idea that we can somehow be exempt from what we see around us. Yes, we are liable as individuals, but that liability begins with the influences which we permit ourselves to see and hear. And this is true for adults - children are still so much more a product of their environments.

I don't know if readers outside the U.S. are familiar with events in Arkansas this week, but I would rather not discuss them here (the news is still available on the web for those interested). Needless to say it was another senseless tragedy, and those directly "responsible" smile from their yearbook photos like any two normal children.

"Where did they get this from?" Guns have been around for a long time. Yet all of a sudden a wave of tragedies has occurred. Shall we imagine to ourselves that these were all simple coincidences? And shall we imagine that all those children who did not do something similar, were also completely unaffected by what they saw and heard?

That great social commentator, Bill Watterson (aka the writer of "Calvin and Hobbes") produced a Sunday morning cartoon ((c) 1994) showing Calvin, the six-year-old boy, sitting in front of a screaming television. Hobbes, the toy tiger who speaks only to Calvin, stands behind the chair. And

the otherwise inert Calvin is sermonizing.

"I read another article whining about how much violence is on television. So I've seen a few thousand homicides in my day. What's the big deal? It's my **right** to watch violence on TV!... And frankly, I like watch shoot outs, car wrecks, fist fights... I like to be **entertained!**"

At this point, Hobbes asks him, "Don't you worry that all this violence is desensitizing?"

Calvin's response: "Nahh. I'd like to shoot the idiots who think this stuff affects me."

This attitude, so popular among TV executives and yet so ridiculous, is rejected by Jewish sources. But as we look at their self-inflicted ignorance of human nature, let us not forget the lesson ourselves. We are, each of us, responsible for influencing those around us, and conversely are influenced if we do not exercise a great deal of adult self-control.

Let us work to be certain that we are positive influences, and work to surround ourselves with positive influences - let us be a community that grows! [And maybe, just maybe, cuts down on TV?]

Good Shabbos,  
Rabbi Yaakov Menken