

FORTUNATE IS THE GENERATION WHOSE LEADERS GOOF... AND THEN ADMIT IT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These Divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #454, Eruv Tavshilin. Good Shabbos!

Fortunate Is The Generation Whose Leaders Goof... And Then Admit It

In this week's parsha, we learn about the laws concerning the situation "When a ruler sins (asher nasi yechtah), and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done - unintentionally - and becomes guilty." [Vayikra 4:22]

Rashi comments on the peculiar expression "asher nasi yechtah" which literally means "THAT the prince sinned." The more common usage throughout the parsha is "v'im" (AND IF). Rashi explains that the word "asher" comes from the same root as "ashrei" (meaning fortunate) as if to say "Fortunate is the generation whose ruler sets his heart to bring an atonement for his unintentional sin." There are a variety of comments recorded by later commentaries on the intent of this statement by Rashi.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in his sefer Oznayim L'Torah suggests that aveiyros [sins] come about as a result of new initiatives. A person will normally not commit an averah when he sticks to the straight and narrow, merely repeating that which has been done in the past without attempting new approaches or enactments. Innovation and change sometimes leads to inadvertent mistakes. The pasuk [verse] is praising the Nasi [leader] who is willing to change and to try something new. Even though such boldness can sometimes lead to inadvertent error, the generation is fortunate to have a leader who is at least willing to try.

Rav Dovid Feinstein provides a different insight, which I believe may be closer to the simple interpretation (p'shat) of the pasuk. People in power are normally not inclined to admit that they did something wrong. A person in power is normally afraid of criticism and second guessing by his opponents. He is very leery to publicly admit, "Guess what? I goofed!"

How many times have we heard the President of the United States - any President of the United

States - admit, "I have made a mistake." The few times when a president does admit to a mistake, he gets lambasted by the press and all his political adversaries. Rare is the public leader who is prepared to stand up in front of his nation and admit to having made a mistake. Happy is the generation that has a leader who is not ashamed to admit that he erred. Fortunate are those led by one secure enough to admit that he is not perfect.

Rav Shimon Schwab explains the very same lesson in explanation of a very perplexing Gemara [Chagiga 14a]. The Gemara states that the prophet Yeshaya cursed the Jewish people with 18 different curses but his mind was not put at ease until he foretold the ultimate indignation: "The youngster will domineer over the elder and the base over the respectable" (lo niskarera da'ato ad) [Yeshaya 3:5].

What is the meaning of this Gemara? Did Yeshaya the prophet hate the Jewish people so much that he said, "I'm going to really give it to them and I won't rest until I give them the ultimate punishment"? Obviously not! That is not the role of a prophet. The role of a prophet is not to beat up the people or to indict them.

Rav Schwab explained that this Gemara is teaching the very same lesson as the pasuk quoted above from Parshas Vayikra as elaborated by Rashi. This final 'curse' actually includes a positive and optimistic message. When the children will point out the foibles of the elders - and perhaps the children were out of line for having such brazenness - but when their criticism will prompt the elders to respond, take stock, and admit that they in fact did make some errors, that is positive. That is in fact what appeased the mind of the prophet Yeshaya. In spite of the fact that the criticism was perhaps not offered with the proper derech erez (manners and protocol), but the leaders were big enough that they could take the criticism and react with corrective action. That is the hallmark of a fortunate generation. It was this good fortune of the Jewish people that put the Prophet's mind at ease.

Fear of Heaven: Never Leave Home Without It

Later on in the parsha we read: "If a person will sin and commit one of all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done, but was unaware and became guilty, and he bears his iniquity" [Vayikra 5:17]. Rashi explains this pasuk to be referring to a case of someone who is in doubt regarding whether or not he has violated a kares bearing prohibition. For example there were two pieces of fat in front of him, one of the pieces was permissible fat (shuman) and one of the pieces was forbidden fat (chelev). He ate one of the pieces and was subsequently told that one of the pieces was forbidden, but he does not know which of the two he ate. In this case, he brings a korban [sacrifice] that is known as a 'conditional guilt offering' (Asham Talui).

This aveiyrah would seem to be even less offensive than an unintentional aveiyrah. Not only was it

unintentional, there is a question as to whether he was in fact in violation of any prohibition at all. It is striking that he needs to bring any offering at all. An offering comes as atonement. What did this person do wrong that requires atonement? In fact, even in the case of a definite unintentional aveiyrah, is far from obvious that any aveiyrah requires the atonement of a sin offering (Korban Chatas).

Rav Eliyahu Dessler [Michtav Eliyahu Part 3] explains that Torah must become such a part of a person's existence that it is literally impossible for him to forget and commit an aveiyrah. The atonements of Korban Chatas and Korban Asham are required because he failed to achieve this level of integration with Torah that requires.

I will give an example and ask your pardon for suggesting such an example. Does anyone ever leave home in the morning having forgotten to put on his pants? Never! We may forget our watch, our keys, our tie, or some other article of clothing, but never our pants. Pants are so integral to our existence, that it is literally impossible for a person to even make the mistake of walking outside his front door without his pants on.

Torah, mitzvos, and fear of G-d, need to be such an integral part of a person's existence that he should not even be able to commit an aveiyrah unintentionally. Imagine if a person wakes up Shabbos morning and goes into the bathroom, turns on the light, starts brushing his teeth and shaving and then remembers "Oh my gosh! Today is Shabbos!" It is true that his aveiyrah was unintentional. It is true he forgot. It is true he was half asleep. But Shabbos is clearly not as vital and integral to him as wearing his pants. He never forgot to put on his pants before leaving the house. How could he forget it was Shabbos?

This is the concept of the atonement of 'Asham Talui' and 'Korban Chatas'. The atonement is about the fact that fear of sin was not real enough and not integral enough and not essential enough in a person's life to prevent him from even unintentionally and even possibly unintentionally committing an aveiyrah.

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