

# THE NETZIV AND LORD ACTON CONVEY THE SAME IDEA

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

## Parshas Vayikra

### The Netziv and Lord Acton Convey The Same Idea

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #630, Gebrochts and Kneidelach. Good Shabbos!*

Parshas Vayikra deals almost exclusively with the various sacrifice offerings people bring on different occasions. Chapter 4 specifically deals with the varying sin offerings different individuals have to bring, depending on their status and the circumstances of their sin.

We have laws regarding "a soul who sins", then laws regarding "the anointed priest who sins", then laws regarding sins by the nation as a whole, based on an erroneous ruling by the Beis Din [Jewish Court], and finally we have the laws of a "Nasi" (referring to the Jewish King) who sins.

When introducing the various laws, there is something unique about the wording used to refer to the sin of the King (Nasi). In speaking about the individual, the Kohen, and the Congregation as a whole the pasuk always uses the expression "Im" or "Ki" (connoting "if"). However, by the King, the pasuk uses the expression "ASHER Nasi yecheta" (WHEN the Nasi will sin), connoting a certainty that this will happen.

Why is this so? The Seforno writes that it is indeed to be expected that the King will sin. He cites the pasuk "And Yeshurun waxed fat and revolted" [Devorim 32:15]. This is one of the truths of the ages, most famously articulated by a British foreign minister, Lord Acton, who said: "Power corrupts." This is what the Torah is saying and this is what the Seforno is saying as well. "ASHER Nasi yecheta" - We can almost count on it that the King will commit a sin because of his power and position.

The Netziv in his He'Emek Davar expands upon the Seforno's idea. The pasuk [Vayikra 4:22] reads: "When the Nasi will sin and will do one of all the commandments of Hashem, His G-d, that should not be done, inadvertently and he will be guilty." Now let us put ourselves back into High School English class and diagram this sentence. No doubt if we wrote such a sentence and tried to diagram it, our English teacher would cut us into pieces. The modifier is in the wrong place. The word

"b'shgaga" (inadvertently) should really be written near the beginning of the pasuk - "v'asa b'shgaga" (and he will do inadvertently that which Hashem said not to do).

That is not how the pasuk reads. The pasuk reads, "He will do one of the commandments Hashem said not to do inadvertently..." In explaining this apparent misplacement of the word "inadvertently," the Netziv writes that the pasuk is hinting that monarchy leads to the transgression of such serious sins that normally one would not even do them inadvertently.

This is an amazing Netziv. The pasuk is saying that because he is the Nasi, he is going to commit a sin that is so bad that most people would not even do it by accident! The average person would never worship Avodah Zarah [idolatry] even inadvertently. But the Nasi has such power and operates in such circles that he is likely to commit even those sins that normally no one commits, even accidentally! This idea of the Netziv is very much in line with the second part of the above-quoted saying of Lord Acton: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

### **Another Interpretation of the Same Phrase**

Rashi quotes a Medrash regarding this above cited expression "Asher Nasi Yecheta." The Medrash links the word "Asher" with the word "Ashrei" [Happy are they]. The connotation is "Happy is the generation who has a leader who is concerned enough to offer a sin offering to seek atonement for his iniquities."

The Pasuk is dealing with an unintentional sin. The King has to admit that he has committed such a sin. This takes a lot of courage. He must humble himself and go to the Kohen in the Temple and tell him that he sinned by accident. This is not so easy to do. In spite of the embarrassment and political ramifications and even Chilul Hashem that may be involved, he humbles himself and admits that he acted in error. If the King can rise above all the pressures to ignore his mistakes and admit them, then indeed happy is the generation who has such a ruler.

I recently read the following story about the Steipler Gaon (Rav Yakov Yisrael Kanievsky) written up by Rav Mordechai Kamenetsky. Everyone wanted to have the honor of the Steipler Gaon, one of the great men of the generation, attending his sons' Bar Mitzvah. As Steipler Gaon became older, it became more difficult for him to go to Simchas. He could spend his whole Shabbos in Bnei Brak going from one Bar Mitzvah to another. There came a point where he had to tell people that he was no longer able to attend Bar Mitzvahs.

However, the Steipler Gaon made an exception and did attend one Bar Mitzvah. After davening, the Steipler Gaon wished the boy Mazal Tov, bent over to whisper something into the boy's ear and spoke to the young boy for a couple of minutes. The boy responded, "No, no, it is alright!" Then the Steipler left.

This was not your typical "Mazal Tov you should grow up to be a Gadol b'Yisrael." It took longer than that. Everyone was wondering what the Steipler wanted from this young Bar Mitzvah boy and what

was the meaning of the Bar Mitzvah boy's reaction (No, no, it's alright!)?

What had happened? Six years previously, when this boy was 7 years old, he was davening in the same shul where the Steipler davened and apparently he had a very large Siddur. The Steipler saw him and thought he was learning out of a Gemara in the middle of davening. He went over to him in the middle of davening and mistakenly criticized him for learning while he should be davening. The boy showed the Steipler he was using a Siddur not a Gemara. The Steipler was very apologetic and asked for forgiveness. The seven year old told him at the time it was okay, he forgave him.

However, the Steipler made a mental note of the event and 6 years later, came to this boy's Bar Mitzvah and explained to him that when he was a katan [a minor], he was not legally eligible to give mechilla [forgiveness]. Therefore, the Steipler was once again asking for forgiveness from him as an adult (gadol). It was regarding this that the young Bar Mitzvah boy responded to the Steipler, "No, no, it's alright I've forgiven you already!"

This is an illustration of Rashi's comment: Happy is the generation who has leaders and Gedolim who are big enough to admit mistakes... and to admit them even to young children! Asher Nasi Yecheta. Ashrei [Happy is] the generation that has such a Nasi.

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