

Parshat VAYIKRA 5777

It is very difficult for people to admit they've made a mistake. It is even more difficult for a leader or king. This is because when someone is in an exalted position of power, it can be hard to accept admonition; especially from those beneath them.

“When a ruler sins, and unintentionally commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem, which may not be done, incurring guilt; if the sin that he committed became known to him, he shall bring his offering: an unblemished male goat.” (Vayikra 22:4-23)

Rashi says that אָשֵׁר over here means ‘fortunate’, not ‘when’. Fortunate is the generation that has a ruler who admits and atones for his unintentional sins. All the more so that he has regrets his intentional sins.

Why does Rashi need to say that is such a big deal when a ruler repents for his sins and that the ruler's nation is fortunate for this happening? Obviously it is an important thing for a ruler to realise he has done something wrong. However, is a ruler's realisation that he has erred somehow more special compared to a normal person?

Yes. Because it can be difficult for kings and rulers to admit they've made a mistake.

The gemora in Zevachim 101a-b retells the argument between Moshe and Aharon (Vayikra 10:) concerning whether the Cohanim should be allowed to eat the Korban Chatas that was brought on Rosh Chodesh Nissan (which coincidentally was this past Tuesday). These Cohanim were in a state of Aninut, which is the first stage of mourning, as נָדָב and אֲבִיהוּא had just died. Moshe said that they should eat the Korban

anyway and was angry with Aharon and the Cohanim for not doing so. Aharon in turn explained to Moshe his reasoning. (According to rashi, Aharon spoke forcefully against Moshe.) Moshe then admitted his mistake openly even though he was the leader. In addition, Moshe did not say “I did not know this Halacha therefore it is not my fault that I made a mistake”, to spare himself embarrassment. Rather he said “I did learn this, and I forgot.” The posuk even says: “It was good in his eyes”, : the fact that he was wrong made no difference to him, the most important thing was that the correct Halacha was put into practice.

Even normal people sometimes find it hard to admit their mistakes.

Pirkei Avos (5:7) states that 7 things are found in a wise man. One of them is” - “He confesses the truth”. Kehati (based on various Meforshim) explains that when a person has a disagreement with his friend and the friend has a valid argument which proves that he is wrong, the person does not keep his side of the argument going with quibbles and fallacious arguments in order to score a point. Rather he acknowledges the truth and is not ashamed to admit that he made a mistake.

Pirkei Avos (5:17) states: “Any dispute which is for the sake of heaven shall in the end be of lasting worth.” When two people are involved in an argument, both of whom search for nothing but the truth and do not debate for the sake of argument or self-grandeur/honour, will eventually find the real answer and a permanent solution for the issue under discussion.