

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 17

Vayikra, Sicha 5

The Verse:

In a discussion about the circumstances when a sin-offering is brought, the Torah states:

“If a leader [of Israel] sins and unintentionally commits one of all the commandments of G-d, which may not be committed, incurring guilt.” (Vayikra 4:22)

The Rashi:

Rashi notes the unusual opening of the verse, אֲשֶׁר נָשִׂיא יִהְיֶה, instead of the more conventional “אם, if.”

If the leader [of Israel] sins: אֲשֶׁר (asher) is an expression reminiscent of the word אֲשֶׁרִי, “fortunate is...,” as if to say: “Fortunate is the generation whose leader “takes it to heart” and gives attention to bringing an atonement offering for his unintentional sins — and how much more will he experience remorse for the sins he has committed willfully!”

The Questions:

1. Why does Rashi offer a Midrashic interpretation of the word “asher,” and not render the word in its literal sense as other commentators do, that the word means “when [a leader]...”?
2. Even if Rashi prefers to render the word in its Midrashic sense as “fortunate,” why does he assume that it is the “generation” that is fortunate and not the leader himself?

The Explanation:

The word “asher” implies a continuation from a previous discussion. In the section prior, the Torah detailed a scenario where the Sanhedrin made a mistaken conclusion which led the community to commit an unwitting transgression. The congregation must bring a sacrifice, “It is a sin offering for the congregation.” (Vayikra 4:13-21) But if the congregation is innocent, and the sin was committed only because of the court’s error, how does the congregation feel at fault? How do they develop the sensitivity to profess a sin that they were blameless in?

The Torah therefore begins our discussion by saying, “If a leader [of Israel] sins, with the language of asher which alludes to the idea of “fortunate.” Because the leader admits to his unintentional sins, this heightens the nation’s sensitivity to their spiritual state and allows them to assume responsibility even for a sin committed at the advice of the courts.

Furthermore, the language of “fortunate is the generation” alludes to a state where a person or community does not sin at all. When the leader, whose task is mainly to care for his people’s material needs, displays spiritual sensitivity by “giving attention to bringing an atonement offering for his unintentional sins,” this makes a lasting impression on his people, encouraging them to be scrupulous in their behavior so they avoid even unintentional sins.

This is in contrast to the scenario with which the chapter begins — the unintentional sins of the anointed Kohen: “If the anointed kohen sins, bringing guilt to the people, then he shall bring for his sin which he has committed” (Ibid, 4:3) Rashi commented on that verse that when “the kohen sins”, it “brings guilt to the people,” because the people are “dependant on the kohen to atone for them and pray for them.” Thus, there is a deep connection between the

kohen and the people as well — when the kohen seeks atonement, this also encourages the people to seek atonement. The difference, however, is that the kohen’s entire task is to provide atonement for the people, so when they see him engaging in repentance, it arouses them to do the same. The leader, however, as mentioned earlier, inspires the people to refrain from sin entirely.

The Deeper Dimension:

Kohanim are thematically related to kindness and love — they arouse the people to love of G-d. The king and leader inspires fear of G-d in the people. Love is an emotion that is centered around the self, while fear is an emotion that vacates the self. Therefore, from “the kohen” from a Divine service based only on love, there can result “guilt of the people,” inadvertent sins. But from “the leader,” a divine service based on awe of G-d, there results a “fortunate generation” who are not susceptible to even inadvertent sins.

The Lesson:

The leader of the individual is his mind. The leader “taking it to heart” means that the mind is in control of the emotions. This is the foundation of avoiding even inadvertent sin, when the mind is always in control.
