

Likkutei Sichos

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Trickle Down Remorse

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RASHI'S COMMENTARY ON "IF A LEADER SINS"

From the verse, "If a leader sins, and inadvertently commits any of the {negative} commandments...."[1] – the passage goes on to say that the leader must bring a sin-offering – Rashi quotes the words, "If a leader sins," and comments:

לעשרי {translated as *If*} A variant of אשר. Fortunate is the generation whose leader sets his heart on bringing an atonement-offering for his inadvertent sin. All the more so he will feel remorse for his deliberate sins!

The source for Rashi's commentary here can be found in rabbinical **exegesis** (in *Torat Kohanim*,[2] and in Talmud[3]). Although Rashi's interpretive approach is to clarify just the simple meaning of Scripture, he does cite rabbinical homiletics that are essential for the understanding of a passage. This is the case with our verse. Rashi must resort to an exegesis of our Rabbis because (as explained in the Talmud[4]): Scripture uses a different term here than would be expected. Earlier, regarding an inadvertent sin of "the Anointed *Kohen*,"[5] and of "the entire community of Israel,"[6] Scripture uses the straightforward Hebrew term, אשר, for **if**: "if, א, the Anointed *Kohen* sins," and "if, א, the entire community of Israel errs." Whereas in our verse, it says, "If, אשר, a leader sins…." For this reason, understandably, the meaning of the term, אשר, is not to be understood in its simple sense.

However, we need to understand: Other classic commentators, who focus on the **simple meaning** of Scripture, offer a number of **straightforward** interpretations of the phrase, "and a superior of the phrase, "If a leader sins" needs to interpretations}: (1) *Ibn Ezra* explains that the phrase, "If a leader sins" needs to be understood as a continuation of the preceding passage, "If the entire congregation of Israel...." {Thus, "ww is not be understood as **if**, but as the relative pronoun – "who."} With our verse, Scripture means to say, "and if the one **who** sins is a leader...."[7] (2) *Ramban* explains that the usage of the word אשר, in our verse, is the same as the word, כאשר, meaning, **when**, indicating time: "**When** a leader sins." As in the verse, "When, כאשר, Joseph came to his brothers,"[8] and "when, כאשר, they finished eating,"[9] and so on. ("Just that in our verse, the *chaf*, c, prefix, indicating a specific time, is omitted."[10])

Even assuming that Rashi considers these interpretations to be strained and that a homiletic teaching of our Rabbis is necessary, still Rashi should have first given an interpretation in accord with *pshat*, and afterward, added, "Its Midrashic interpretation," or "Our Sages have expounded," or something similar. Why does Rashi cite **only** the interpretation "Fortunate is the generation," without even noting its Midrashic origin?

2.

QUESTIONS ON "FORTUNATE IS THE GENERATION"

Even if we assume that Rashi's interpretation is consistent with the simple meaning of Scripture, we need to solve the following difficulties:

- How do we explain the interpolation, "Fortunate is the generation"? What is the proof that אשר, fortunate, refers to the generation and not to the leader, the subject of our verse?[11]
- 2. In what way does a **generation** benefit when its **leader** "sets his heart on bringing an atonement-offering for his inadvertent sins"?
- 3. How is the remark "Fortunate is the generation..." **relevant** to a better understanding the subject of the leader's sin-offering?
- 4. In the above-mentioned Midrashim, the statement "Fortunate is the generation" is followed by an explanation:[12] "If his leader brings a sin-offering, then surely this must be the case of an ordinary person." Commentators[13] explain that latter statement clarifies the former, "Fortunate is the generation": Because when the leader brings an offering for his sin, the people of his generation (the ordinary folk) will

learn from his example, by *a fortiori*, to repent, and to bring an offering for their own sins.

In light of this, the following is completely baffling: Why does Rashi **omit** the concluding remark of this Midrash ("If his leader brings...") as it, specifically, clarifies the point of "Fortunate is the **generation**," which Rashi cites in his commentary?[14] On the contrary, if an older student of Mishnah, a *ben esser le'Mishnah*, requires this explanation {to clarify why the 'generation is fortunate'} then how much more so does a younger student of Scripture, the *ben chamesh le'Mikrah*!

Noteworthy is that some commentators explain the rationale for the assertion, "Fortunate is the generation" as follows: Since the leader regrets his accidental sin and is not ashamed to admit his guilt – he doesn't try to cover-up his misdeed, rationalizing that he is too important to publically confess his sin – which demonstrates his humility and humbleness – therefore, "Fortunate is the generation" whose leader "isn't autocratic or egotistical." Consequently, "his reign will endure."

However, from the perspective of *pshat*, this doesn't explain why the **generation** is fortunate. Seeing that the (main) beneficiary is (not the people of that generation, but) the leader or the king, whose **sovereignty** will endure – why emphasize "Fortunate is the **generation**"?

3.

QUESTIONS ON THE NUANCES IN RASHI'S DICTION

In addition, we need to understand:

1) In the (aforementioned) teachings of our Sages, the text reads "Fortunate is the generation whose leader brings a sin-offering, הטאת, for his inadvertent sin."[15] Rashi, though, alters this wording, and is more verbose: "**sets his heart**[16] on bringing[17] an **atonement**-offering,[18], כפרה for his inadvertent sin"? 2) Why does Rashi quote from the passage only the words, "If a leader sins"? Since the good fortune is due to the leader for bringing "an atonement-offering for his inadvertent sin," Rashi should also quote the verse that follows (which speaks about the offering that had to be brought), or he should at least allude to this continuation by concluding his quotation with *etcetera*.[19]

4.

"FORTUNATE" — NOT BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WILL LEARN FROM THE LEADER — THE NASI

The solution to these difficulties:

Rashi needn't tell us that his comment here, "Fortunate is the generation whose leader sets his heart...," is based on a Midrash, or the like, because he has already explained this earlier, concerning the same concept {i.e., the relationship between the whole nation and the transgressor}: On the verse,[20] "If the Anointed *Kohen* sins, bringing guilt to the people," Rashi remarks, "The plain meaning of this verse, however, is **according to the Aggadah**: When the *Kohen Gadol* sins, this constitutes the very guilt of the people. For they rely on him to effect their atonement and to pray for them, but now he has become unfit." Therefore, Rashi needn't point out again here that his interpretation {which again posits a relationship between the nation and the sinner} is "the plain meaning, according to the *Aggadah*."

In light of this (previous) commentary of Rashi, we are compelled to say that the good fortune Rashi refers to here ("fortunate is the generation") is not to be understood like the conclusion and explanation suggested earlier (in sec. 2) viz., that by bringing a sin-offering, the leader serves as a role model to the people. If this were the case, then the following question would arise: Why wouldn't the people also learn from the conduct of the Anointed *Kohen* that one ought to bring an offering to atone for a sin? Why, then, allude to the good fortune only in the case of a leader, and **not earlier**, on the passage discussing the Anointed *Kohen* as bringing guilt to the people – emphasizing the very **opposite** of good fortune!

Granted, one might argue that the conduct of the leader carries more weight than that of the Anointed *Kohen*: If the leader, whose "heart is not subdued," and who is in an elevated and exalted state, as the term *Nasi* denotes, nonetheless, repents and brings an offering for his sin, then how much more so must the rest of the nation – commoners who lack this elevated quality – conduct themselves in this way.

On the other hand, there is an advantage to deducing the *a fortiori* from the conduct of the Anointed *Kohen*, i.e., the *Kohen Gadol*: Because of his holiness, and his continual ministry in the Temple, the *Kohen Gadol* is set apart from the people. Moreover, he is instrumental in achieving atonement for the Jewish nation. Despite all this, he brings a sacrifice for his inadvertent sin, in the manner specified in Torah—"He shall take out the entire bull outside the camp,"[21] meaning, "outside the three camps."[22] Doing so, enables people from all three camps to observe him bringing his sacrifice for his inadvertent sin. How much more so then should others, who are far beneath his stature, learn from his example not to be ashamed to bring a sacrifice for their sin.

The above logic proves that the meaning of the declaration, "Fortunate is the generation," made regarding a leader, is not because his generation will *learn* by his example {to bring a sacrifice} (using *a fortiori* reasoning). Rather because of another consideration (not present in the situation of an Anointed *Kohen*), which Rashi deduces from this verse, as will be explained.

5.

RASHI CONCLUDES THAT "FORTUNATE" IS NOT FOR THE **BRINGING** OF THE SACRIFICE

The verse,1 "If (אשר) a leader sins," raises two questions:

1. The term אשר (as ordinarily used) signals that Scripture is still in the midst of discussing a subject, and what follows is a continuation of what was written earlier. Not understood, then, is this: What connection is there between the subject of our verse, "If a leader sins," and the previous subject[23] {which discusses an inadvertent sin

committed by the community, and concludes with the verse[24]}, "It is a sin offering for the congregation"?[25]

2. If the intent of Scripture in using the term אשר is to emphasize the good fortune of the generation whose leader brings a sacrifice for his inadvertent sin, Scripture should *not* have alluded to this with the phrase, "If (אשר) a leader sins," a phrase speaking about the **sin** of a leader. Rather, Scripture should have alluded to this idea in the next verse, which speaks about the leader's rehabilitation, his repentance and atonement, "his sin... is made known to him, then he shall bring his offering...." It seems inappropriate to allude to the idea of good fortune in the context of sin!

Because of these two questions, Rashi concludes that the good fortune referred to by Scripture regarding a leader is not connected with his act of bringing a sacrifice for his inadvertent sin, but rather is connected with another aspect of the sin, as will be explained. For this reason, Rashi alters the wording of our Sages, writing instead, "**sets his heart** to bring an atonement-offering for his inadvertent sins."

6.

THE LEADER SENSITIZES THE NATION TO THE GRAVITY OF A SIN

In the preceding passage, it says,6 "And if the entire community of Israel errs because a matter was hidden from the eyes of the congregation, and they commit...," referring to a situation in which the *Sanhedrin* "issued an erroneous decision regarding any matter in the Torah that incurs the penalty of excision, by declaring that matter permissible... and the community acted upon their instruction."[26] Nonetheless, Scripture goes on to say,[27] "It is a sin offering for the congregation."

It is self-understood that when a Jew brings a sin offering, he experiences (and is meant to experience) feelings of remorse and repentance. So, too, in our scenario, since the Torah emphasizes, "It is a sin offering for the congregation," we may presume that the congregation also feels remorseful and repentant. This, though, gives us reason to wonder: How is it possible for the entire congregation

to feel remorseful and repentant about a "sin" for which they were not guilty, even accidentally? After all, compliance with the directives of the *Sanhedrin* is demanded **by the Torah**!

Addressing this problem, Rashi explains that this is why it states, "If (אשר) a leader sins." Rashi doesn't need to mention that אשר implies *if*, as this is self-understood. Rashi needs only to point out the novel insight suggested by the Torah's use of this term. Since the term refers back to the previous passage, we deduce that the *pshat* here follows the interpretation found in the *Aggadah*. Namely, אשרי is a derivative of אשרי. When a leader stumbles by transgressing inadvertently, his response is not to simply want to discharge his Torah obligation to bring an offering. Rather, he also senses the blemish caused by the sin, and senses its severity. Accordingly, he doesn't just actually bring a sacrifice. Instead, he also "**sets his heart** on bringing an **atonement-offering** for his inadvertent sin. All the more so he will **feel remorse** for his deliberate sins." Consequently, "Fortunate is the **generation**." For the leader, {by his determination and genuine remorse} thereby sensitizes the people of his generation to the gravity of an inadvertent sin, making them aware as to how careful one must be not to stumble by sinning even inadvertently.

This explains the connection between the passage, "If a leader sins" and the preceding one, "It is a sin offering for the congregation." Since the leader is keenly sensitive to the severity of even an inadvertent sin, understandably, then, when even the entire congregation sins, even if they were not at fault, the behavior of the leader awakens within them all the emotions that are meant to be felt by those bringing a sacrifice – remorse and repentance.

7.

THE ANNOINTED KOHEN RECTIFIES A SIN; THE LEADER PREVENTS IT

In light of the above, we understand why regarding the Anointed *Kohen*, Scripture says,5 "bringing guilt to the people," but makes no reference to the good fortune of the generation, which Scripture does allude to in the case of a leader who sins. **"Fortunate** is the generation" is praise applicable principally to a generation that refrains from sinning in the first place; it is not as applicable to a generation that does stumble, but afterward repents and brings a sacrifice.

This is the difference between the Anointed *Kohen* and the leader: The role of the Anointed *Kohen* is "to effect their atonement and to pray for them"[28] – to offer up sacrifices and to atone for the Jewish people. Consequently, even when people see that the Anointed *Kohen* brings a sacrifice for his inadvertent sin, they will be inspired with a feeling (not so much to avoid sin at the outset, but) not to be embarrassed to bring a sacrifice after sinning inadvertently.

[Even when the Anointed *Kohen* does rouse the Jews concerning the gravity of sin, since his **function** is to atome for the Jewish people, he is ineffective in influencing them to take precautions against sinning. He only motivates them to rectify and atome for their sins, consistent with his role.]

In contrast, the role of a leader is to guide his generation and to involve himself in governmental affairs and matters of state. Yet, even while so occupied, he "**sets his heart** on bringing an atonement-offering for his inadvertent sin." Thus, he demonstrates his sensitivity to the gravity of sin, and as a result, sensitizes everyone else. In this way, he inspires others to refrain from sinning in the first place. Consequently, "**Fortunate** is the generation."

8.

THE KOHEN GADOL INSPIRES LOVE OF HASHEM; THE KING — FEAR OF HASHEM

From the "wine of Torah" in Rashi's commentary: Here, the connotation of the word נשיא {translated as} *leader*, is not a tribal leader but "the King, as it says, 'any of the commandments of G-d,' referring to a person over whom there is no other authority except the L-rd, his G-d."[29] This can also be inferred from the teaching itself, noting that it says, "Fortunate is the **generation**."

The difference between the *Kohen Gadol* and the King, in terms of their respective influence over the Jewish people, is the following: The *Kohen Gadol* inspires the Jewish people to love G-d – with 'abundant love,'[30] whereas the

King inspires the Jewish people to surrender themselves to G-d and to fear Him.[31]

Love is the root of all the 248 positive commandments, and fear, of all the 365 negative commandments. Accordingly, what emerges is that from the perspective of the divine service of the *Kohen Gadol* – who inspires the love of G-d – a person feels that G-d's will must be fulfilled – in our context – that a sacrifice must be brought. However, when considered from the perspective of the fear of G-d, the gravity of a sin is felt. A person "fears to rebel against the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."[32]

9.

THE FEAR OF HASHEM — SELFLESSNESS AND ABSTENTION FROM SIN

A deeper explanation: Sin offerings are brought for inadvertent transgressions. Nonetheless, the very fact that a person can stumble by sinning inadvertently proves that his spiritual health is not what it should be, because the possibility of inadvertent sin comes from "the rise of the animal soul {whose life-force derives} from *nogah*."[33]

Therefore, concerning an Anointed *Kohen*, Scripture uses the phrase, "bringing guilt to the people," whereas concerning a leader, Scripture uses the term, $\forall x \in \{if, a \text{ variant of } \forall x \neq implying,$ "Fortunate is the generation." For when a person's service of G-d is prompted by his love of G-d, nurtured by the *Kohen Gadol*, this love, at the level of "people,"[34] might deteriorate gradually into inadvertent sin. This might happen since a person's ego becomes inflated,[35] as love, even the holiest types, entails an expanded awareness of one's own being – "there is somebody who loves,"[36] because the emotion of love is linked to a person's existence.

In contrast, from the fear of G-d inculcated into them by the King (who is nullified to the monarchy of G-d, and from whom the nation is influenced to subjugate itself), the Jewish people are utterly nullified to G-d. Therefore, there is no opportunity for deterioration to the point where a person feels as if he is an independent being with an independent existence. Consequently, there is also no possibility of inadvertent sin.

10.

THE MIND RULES OVER THE HEART

The lesson to be learned from Rashi's commentary and applied to a person's spiritual service is this:

The world at large can be seen as a macrocosm; and the person, as a microcosm.[37] Just as the world at large has a "leader of the generation" – a king – so, too, a person's body has a king. This is the head and mind, which rule over a person's entire body. [This control is alluded to by the Hebrew word for "king," $_{38}$]. The word can be seen as an acronym for: brain (מוח), heart (לב), and liver (כבד), the three principal organs directing a person's body.[39] The first letter of this acronym (which is the **foremost** part of the word), its beginning,[40] is the letter *mem*, *n*, referring to the brain of the person.]

This is the lesson to be gleaned from the teaching, "Fortunate is the generation...." The conduct of a "generation," i.e., a person is proper, fortunate, when its "**leader** sets his heart" -41 [\Box [\Box] - meaning, when the mind rules over the heart. For "each person may, with the will-power in his brain, restrain himself and control the drive of lust that is in his heart, preventing his heart's desires from expressing themselves in action, word or thought."[42] Then, a person will be safeguarded from sinning accidentally.

And when a person does sin, if even inadvertently, not only must he repent in deed – bringing a sacrifice for his inadvertent transgression – but he must contemplate with his mind that he is really at fault. For as explained above, if he had not made it possible for his animal soul to prevail, he would not have been reduced to this.

And when a person reflects deeply upon the gravity of an act that opposes the Supernal Will,[43] then 'his leader sets his heart'[44] – his mind (the leader) will bring about submission within the **heart**,[45] feelings of "contrition and brokenness." In this way, not only is the inadvertent sin atoned for, but, in

general, "the spirit of defilement and impurity is removed,"43 and the animal soul defeated and subjugated.

When a person repents in this way for an inadvertent sin, "All the more so, קל קל, he will feel remorse for his deliberate sins." He will deduce from the קל, from what is easily understood, i.e., not to stumble by transgressing deliberately, because his animal soul and evil inclination will have been broken and subdued.

When the "leader," the mind in every Jew, exercises command and control, this will accelerate the materialization of the prophecy,[46] "My servant David shall be their leader forever," and "shall be King over them," so that this promise will be fulfilled in our generation. This will come to pass with the arrival of Mashiach, when G-d's sovereignty will be revealed, and He will reign as King over the entire world (the generation).

From a talk delivered on Shabbos Parshas Vayikra, 5728

[1] *Lev.* 4:22.

[2] On our verse.

[3] *Horayot* 10b; *Yerushalmi*, *ibid.*, ch. 3, par. 2; *Tosefta* on *Bava Kama*, ch. 7, par. 2, but Rashi introduces changes to these sources, as will be explained shortly.

[4] Horayot, ibid.; See Rashi, ad loc, s.v. "שאני" {See Siftei Chachamim, on Lev. 4: 22.}

[5] *Lev.* 4:3. {The Anointed *Kohen* in the passage refers to the High Priest, known as the *Kohen Gadol*.}

[6] *Lev.* 4:13.

[7] Rashbam likewise comments that the grammatical usage of the term אשר in our verse is similar to its usage in Esther (6:8), "the royal crown, אשר, that is

placed on his head." {As in our verse, אשר serves there as a relative pronoun. And as in our verse, the relative pronoun is placed before the subject of the sentence.}

[8] Gen. 37:23.

[9] Gen. 43:2.

[10] Ramban, ad loc.

[11] *Divrei Dovid* answers that this praise cannot be intended to refer to the leader, as it is obvious that his behavior is commendable. So Scripture would gain nothing by alluding to this. Therefore, Rashi learns that the good fortune must be referring to the generation. (*Mincha Blelulah* answers similarly.) However, this approach is difficult, because Scripture, understandably, could be giving the leader, especially, extra praise, as submission of this sort (i.e., offering a public sacrifice for his inadvertent sin) runs contrary to the self-confident, and self-possessed character of a true leader.

^[12] This is how the text reads in *Horayot*, *ibid*. A similar reading is found in *Torat Kohanim*. In the *Talmud Jerusalem*, a slightly different reading is found.

[13] Be'er Shevah on Horayot, ad loc; Korban Aaron on Torat Kohanim; Pnei Moshe and Mareh Panim on Talmud Jerusalem, ad loc, et al.

^[14] This omission also makes it very unlikely that this is the interpretation intended by Rashi (as some super-commentators suggest—see fn. 11.)

^[15] This is the reading in *Torat Kohanim*, *Tosefta*, and *Jerusalem Talmud* (except that in the *Jerusalem Talmud* the definite article "the" is absent). In the *Babylonian Talmud*, it says, "whose leader brings an *offering* [instead of *sin-offering*] for his inadvertent sin."

[16] In the Hebrew original, נותן לב; lit. "gives his heart."

^[17] This is the reading found in the majority of published editions, including the first edition, and in numerous manuscripts. However, in the second edition, and in some manuscripts, the more succinct wording is employed, "whose leader

brings...." This is the reading, too, found in *Tur HaAruch's* commentary on Rashi. However, *Ramban* cites the wording found in *Torat Kohanim*.

[18] This is the term also used in the second edition of Rashi. However, in a number of manuscripts, it says, "brings an offering, קרבן, which is the reading found in the *Babylonian Talmud*.

^[19] The simple answer to this question is that sometimes Rashi quotes only the beginning of a passage, although his intention is also to its entire continuation, as discussed several times.

[20] *Lev.* 4:3.

[21] *Lev.* 4:12.

[22] Rashi, ad loc.

[23] {Beginning, *Lev.* 4:13.}

[24] Lev. 4:23.

[25] See Bachya; Panay'ach Raza; Baal HaTurim Al HaTorah on the phrase, "מנחה בלולה"; Shach Al HaTorah.

[26] Rashi on *Lev.* 4:12.

[27] *Lev.* 4:21.

[28] Rashi on *Lev.* 4:3.

[29] *Horayot* 10a.

[30] In the Heb, original, "ahavah rabbah."

[31] Derech Mitzvotecha, "Mitzvah min'u'i melech," at the beginning.

[32] *Tanya*, ch. 4.

[33] *Tanya*, "*Iggeret HaKodesh*," Epistle 28. (Based on *Likutei Torah*, by the *Ari'zal*, on *parshat Va'Yikrah*.) See Rashi, s.v. "תולה," *Shavuot* 2a. Also, see Rashi on *Gen*. 95:5, and on *Ex*. 21:13.

[34] Cf. Tanya, ch. 35.

[35] Literally, "his essential existence."

[36] See Tanya, "Shaar HaYichud Ve'ha'Emunah," ch. 7. Cf. Rashi on Num. 11:1.

[37] *Tanchuma*, "*parshat Pekudei*," par. 3; *Zohar* vol. 3, 33b; *Tikunei Zohar* 469, 100b; cf. *Avot d'Rav Natan*, ch. 31, par. 3.

[38] *Magen Avot*, by the *Rashbatz*, ch. 5, par. 19; *Erchai HaKinuim*, by the same author of *Sefer HaDorot*, entry מלך; *Nitzutzei Orot* on *Zohar* vol. 2, 153b.

[39] Zohar, ibid. Also, Zohar Chadash Ruth 80a.

[40] See *Tanya*, "*Shaar HaYichud Ve'HaEmunah*," ch. 12, which explains that the order of precedence in the lettering of a word is indicative of the precedence of the divine energy in the corresponding object.

[41] {Literally, "gives his heart."}

[42] *Tanya*, ch. 12.

[43] Tanya, "Iggeret HaTeshuvah," ch. 7.

[44] Note that "the essence of *teshuvah* takes place in the heart (*Tanya*, ch. 29; *Iggeret HaKodesh*, sec. 10)"; see also *Iggeret HaTeshuvah*, ch. 1, *et al*.

[45] To elucidate from the wording of the *Rambam* (*Hilchot Teshuvah*, ch. 2, par.2), "How is *teshuvah* performed? By a sinner forsaking his sin, banishing it from his *thoughts*, and resolving *in his heart*...."

[46] *Ezekiel* 37:24-25.