

Vayikrah 5784

This week is פרשת ויקרא, a very action-packed week - פורים and פרשת זכור - introduces us to the קרבנות before the initiation of the משכן. The כהנים and כלל ישראל had to be taught all about the קרבנות. קרבנות are a vital part of the עבודה. All of our davening today is to replace the קרבנות. It is so essential that in the פריערדיקע דורות, when little קינדלעך first started learning חומש, they did not begin with בראשית but rather with ויקרא. The Rabbeim wanted to introduce the קינדלעך to ובטהרה, highlighting the incredible spiritual level of the קרבנות. We would do well to focus on them, study them, and learn them to the best of our abilities.

One of the קרבנות mentioned in this פרשה refers to the מלך. In the middle of the פרשה, the פסוק (4:22) begins with three famous words: אֲשֶׁר נָשִׂיא יִחָטֵא. One of the מפרשים makes an interesting observation: it does not say אִם נָשִׂיא יִחָטֵא - "If the נשיא [which refers to the מלך] will do an עבירה" - but rather אֲשֶׁר - "When he will do an עבירה." Why? The reason is simple. Once a person attains power, power corrupts. As the famous saying goes, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." It is clear, obvious, and expected that the נשיא will commit עבירות. The authority and power given to him can go to his head.

The מפרש then offers a fascinating insight into these three words, אֲשֶׁר נָשִׂיא יִחָטֵא. What are the first letters of each word? א' נ' י' - אני. "It's me. It's all about me." We see this every day, everywhere in the world. Power brings corruption to leaders. The פסוק is teaching us that the תורה understands human nature all too well, and this is precisely what the entire תורה is teaching us - to understand ourselves so that we can improve.

However, the מדרש flips this idea on its head. It explains that the word אשר, which seems to indicate the inevitability of corruption, actually stands for אשרי, as רש"י explains: אֲשֶׁרִי הַדּוֹר שֶׁהַנָּשִׂיא שָׁלוּ נֹתֵן לֵב לְהִבְיֵא - "It's a remarkable generation, a praiseworthy generation, whose נשיא is willing to recognize his mistakes and bring a קרבן for an עבירה that he did." This is a rare and remarkable trait, so the פסוק uses the word אשרי.

And this lesson applies not only to a מלך or a president but to each and every one of us. Every person has the tendency to let things go to their head - to think, "It's all about me. It has to be my way. I did it my way" [not a bad song]. But we must recognize our place. We must know when it should be our way and when it should not. We must learn humility, be able to admit our mistakes, and grow from them. Good Shabbos!

