

# When An Entire Culture Messes Up

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Parshat Vayikra

## Leviticus 4:13-15

וְאִם כָּל־עֵדֻת יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁגּוּ וַנִּעְלַם דְּבַר מֵעֵינֵי הַקֹּהֵל וְעָשׂוּ אֶחָת מִכָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וְאָשָׁמוּ: וַנִּדְעָה הַחֲטָאתָא אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ עָלֶיהָ וְהִקְרִיבוּ הַקֹּהֵל פֶּרֶךְ בֶּן־בְּקָר לְחֲטָאתָא וְהֵבִיאוּ אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי אֱהֹל מוֹעֵד: וְסָמְכוּ זְקֵנֵי הָעֵדָה אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם עַל־רֹאשׁ הַפֶּרֶךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַפֶּרֶךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:

If it is the **whole assembly (edah) of Israel** that has erred and the matter escapes the **notice of the congregation (kahal)**, so that they do any of the things which by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and **they realize their guilt**— when the sin through which they incurred guilt becomes known, the congregation shall offer a bull of the herd as a sin offering, and bring it before the Tent of Meeting. The elders of the community shall lay their hands upon the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD.

## Or HaChayim

The word עדת, *edah*, "assembly of" is referring to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. The word עדה (*edah*) in this verse and the word עדה (*edah*) in Numbers 35,24-25 both are a reference to the Sanhedrin of 71 sages...[This sin offering occurs] only if the Court erred in its judgment **and** the people acted upon that error in judgment. If the members of the Court themselves acted upon their faulty judgment this is still no reason to apply the legislation stated in this paragraph seeing that the Torah writes ועשו והקהל, "and the community did accordingly."

## Rabbeynu Bahya

"and if the entire assembly of Israel err, etc." The "assembly" referred to in our verse is the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court. It could not be otherwise, as it is quite impossible for the entire Jewish nation by themselves to commit the same sin by mistake.

## Rashi

**The elders of the assembly** i.e., the leaders. They place their hands for themselves, and for all Israel, since it is impossible for every person in Israel to place his hands himself.

- **Who is responsible for bringing the sin to light?**
- **Once the sin is known -- what is the role of the people? Of the leadership?**
- **What are the strengths and weaknesses of this model of collective accountability?**

## **How does this biblical model of accountability differ from the modern template of “culture crisis response”?**

1. A crisis is publicized in the popular press.
2. Leadership implements some initial improvement actions, but they are often widely criticized.
3. An independent investigation is launched.
4. A detailed report is published highlighting many flaws in systems, structures, leadership, training, and other areas.
5. A small group of employees, viewed as the worst offenders, are fired or resign.
6. Leadership implements new controls and other improvements, but culture is not assessed with the depth necessary to know if they are having the desired impact on shifting the culture.
7. The organization/crisis drops from the headlines. There are differing opinions about the effectiveness of improvement actions and the impact on the broader culture, even if most are confident the specific original problem will not reoccur.
8. The organization is “wounded” for years or decades that follow as the crisis becomes an unshakable part of their history.

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