

He said, “It is not the sound of shouting of might nor the sound of shouting of weakness; a distressing sound do I hear.” (32:18)

Yehoshua informed Moshe *Rabbeinu* that he heard the sound of battle in the Jewish camp. Moshe *Rabbeinu* replied that battle sounds consist of either the sound of victory or the sound of defeat. The sound that he heard was much different. It was the sound of blasphemy and vilification, which distresses the soul of everyone who hears it. In other words, *Klal Yisrael* had sinned, and the sounds that they were hearing were the sounds of blasphemy. The **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, explains that Moshe was actually critiquing Yehoshua for not yet being able to discern between sounds. A leader must be acutely aware of the intimation of each sound. The people were conveying a message. A leader must be able to distinguish between the sounds of battle and the sound that accompanies the revelry of *avodah zarah*, idol-worship.

In his addendum to the *Chafetz Chaim*, **Horav Shmuel Greineman, zl**, writes that he found a *Midrash* in *Sefer Bamidbar* 20:3, *Vayarev ha'am im Moshe*, “The people quarreled with Moshe.” The *Midrash* says: “When Miriam passed, Moshe and Aharon were occupied with her. Meanwhile, the people were thirsty and sought relief. Once Miriam had died, her merit, through which the nation had received water, was gone. When Moshe and Aharon saw the nation converging on them, Moshe said to Aharon, “Tell me, what type of gathering is this?” Aharon immediately replied, “Are they not the descendants of the Patriarchs, individuals who act kindly, the sons of individuals who act kindly; surely they have come to perform *chesed*, kindness, with Miriam.” Moshe replied, “Are you unable to discern between ‘gatherings’? This assembly is not an assembly for *takanah*, for constructive purposes. This gathering is bent on destruction. If there had been a positive reason for this assembly, they would have come in a dignified manner, with officers and individual leaders at the head of each group. Instead, whom do we see at the forefront? The rabble-rousers. And you feel that they are coming as a gesture of good faith? No. They are coming to spur dissent and usurp the leadership.”

A leader must be able to “split hairs” when it comes to emotion. He must understand what message his congregants are conveying to him – even if they do not articulate it. He must distinguish between “sounds”: between strength and weakness; between joy and depression; between success and failure. A leader must understand the needs of his flock and the underlying reason for their “gatherings.” Often, meetings are organized with a deep-rooted agenda, the goal of which is far from constructive. Sadly, at times, most of those involved in the meeting have no clue concerning its true motive.

Individuals declare that they want change; they are seeking to raise the standards of observance, to guard against incursion, to elevate the banner of Torah; to increase *achdus*, unity, among all members of the community. The Torah leadership of a community must be aware of their true intentions. It might be sincere, but then, it might very well be nothing more than a sham, an

opportunity to convene a group to ratify a self-proclaimed proposal, which will serve as a medium for rubber-stamping their own misguided policies.

They protest, claiming that their goal is sincere: unity among Jews – regardless of background and religious affiliation. Are they really seeking to unify, or is it nothing more than a ploy to create greater discord and make the Torah-observant seem cold, dispassionate and unyielding?

A true leader develops a mindset geared towards his congregation. He understands them and empathizes with their needs. His mind revolves around them as he thinks only of them. As a parent understands the individual sounds/cries/laughter of his/her child, so, too, is a Torah leader able to distinguish between the cries of his congregation. *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, relates that the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponevez, **Horav David Povarsky, zl**, was such a leader.

Upon arising from his sleep one day, the *Rosh Yeshivah* swallowed an antibiotic pill which the doctor had prescribed for him. The pill, which should have immediately gone down his esophagus, became lodged in his trachea. The *Rosh Yeshivah* began to choke, as he attempted to cough up the pill. The students who were there immediately took hold of him and made every maneuver to help extricate the pill. It took ten minutes for the pill to finally be expelled.

Rav Povarsky was visibly shaken by his ordeal. His reaction is a lesson in leadership: “I feel bad for those who had to watch my travail. They must have been so scared.” Imagine, an individual who, while he was choking, thought of nothing else other than the emotions coursing through the minds of his students. This was a person who thought not of himself – but of his students, a true leader. This is, however, not all. After the ordeal, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explained in what merit he was saved. “If *chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid, the pill would not have been expelled, I would not have made it to the *yeshivah* in time for *davening*. I was well aware that *Horav Shach*, the *Rosh Yeshiva*, was ill and would not attend *davening*. I, therefore, prayed to Hashem, entreating Him, ‘If Rav Shach was out, and I would be unable to come to *davening*, what image would the *Yeshivah* have, if the two *Roshei Yeshivah* were not there.’”

This is what went through Rav David Povarsky’s mind as he choked on a tablet. He disregarded his pain, the danger in which he was in – everything. He thought only of the *Yeshivah*!