

He said, “Not a sound shouting strength nor a sound shouting weakness; a sound of distress do I hear.” (32:18)

Yehoshua heard the sound of celebration over the Golden Calf. He erred in mistaking the sounds of joyful rebellion for a response to an aggressive attack. Moshe *Rabbeinu* corrected him, explaining that it was clear from the sound that it was far from a response to war. The sounds to the discerning ears of our quintessential leader meant that the ultimate tragedy had struck the nation: they had rebelled against Hashem. Moshe’s lengthy response to Yehoshua seems questionable. He said, “Not a sound of strength, nor a sound of weakness, but a sound of distress do I hear.” Could he not just have said, “I do not hear a sound of strength”? Why did he deliver the whole speech? Furthermore, as cited by *Ramban* from *Midrash Koheles* 9:11, Moshe rebuked Yehoshua, saying, “One who will one day exercise leadership over the nation, is unable to discern between sounds?” Why does this indicate a deficiency in Yehoshua’s ability to lead the nation? Does just the fact that he thought the sound that he heard was a sound of victory serve as a reason for rendering him unfit to lead the nation?

Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, explains that there is much more to the dialogue than a simple critique of Yehoshua’s auditory skills. We find that, with *Klal Yisrael’s* acceptance of the Torah, the people were liberated from their subservience to both the nations of the world and the *Malach Ha’Maves*, Angel of Death. Jewish mortality had reached the same level that had existed prior to the sin of Adam *HaRishon*, Primordial Man. *Chazal* derive this from the homiletic rendering of the word *charus*, *v’hamichtav michtav Elokim hu*, *charus al haLuchos*, “And the script was the script of G-d, engraved on the *Luchos*” (Ibid. 32:16).

Chazal say, “*Charus*, engraved, do not read it as *charus*, engraved, but rather, as *cheirus*, liberated. This teaches us that through the vehicle of *Mattan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish nation was granted freedom from subservience to the nations of the world. Indeed, had Moshe not been compelled to shatter the *Luchos*, no nation could ever harm us, and we would have prevailed over the Angel of Death.”

We now understand what Moshe was intimating to Yehoshua. If the Jewish People were on their newly-acquired spiritual perch, then there could not be heard any sounds of war – be it victorious or defeat. No nation could rise against them. They had received the Torah and were now freed from external dominance from the nations of the world. “Yehoshua! Do you not know this? War cannot exist in the Jewish camp if the people still remained on the level of *Kabbolas HaTorah*, Receiving the Torah. If it is true as you contend, however, that there are sounds of war emanating from the Jewish camp, then something is terribly amiss. We have a serious problem. Clearly, the Jewish People have sinned and have deviated from the Torah.”

Moshe’s intention was not to insinuate to Yehoshua that he was unfit to lead the nation; rather, he was saying that, as a leader, he should be acutely aware that, post-*Mattan Torah*, there can no

longer be any sounds of war – unless...