

## **Yehoshua heard the sound of the people in its shouting, and he said to Moshe, “The sound of battle is in the camp.” (32:17)**

Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the Jewish People’s quintessential leader, could discern the true nature of the sounds that emanated from their camp. He understood that the shouting was an indication that the people were actually enjoying their blatant rebellion against Hashem. Yehoshua, however, thought it was the people’s response to an aggressive attack. Celebrating by means of the blasphemous and immoral behavior which accompanied their worship of the molten calf conveyed a depressing message to Moshe: these people were enjoying their sinfulness. It is very difficult to change a person who rejoices and luxuriates in his iniquity.

This is one approach to understanding the shouting that came from the camp. *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* writes: *Kad me’yab’vin b’chedva ka’dum eglah*, “As they wailed with joy before the calf.” The choice of words *me’yab’vin* which is related to *yevavah*, wailing, seems misplaced. If they were having a “good time,” where does *yevavah* enter the picture? A *kol yevavah*, wailing sound, is a term used to describe the blowing of the *teruah* sound with the *Shofar* – which certainly does not evoke a joyful response.

The *Mirrer Mashgiach*, *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, derives a powerful lesson from here – one that we should reflect upon over and over. Anyone who has savored the taste of Torah, and has imbibed Torah lessons either during his youth in a *yeshivah* setting, or in a *bais medrash*, a *shul* – even if later, Heaven forbid, he were to reject his learning, his Torah-oriented life – will **never** fully appreciate a life of sin. The taste of sin, which some feel is worth rejecting everything for which our people have lived and died, this taste will forever elude him. This is what Torah does for the one who learns it: it destroys the desire for the taste of sin! He will no longer enjoy his transgression. Something will always be tugging at him, reminding him: This is not for you; you are better than this.

The question that presents itself is: How do we reconcile the *peshatim*, interpretations, which reflect two extreme perspectives on *Klal Yisrael’s* sin? *Sforno* feels that the joy destroyed them. The debauchery accompanied by frivolity, their dancing and out-of-control lewd behavior, sealed their fate. *Targum Yonasan* claims that they “wailed” joyfully. Their joy was not real. It was a “put-on.”

Perhaps we should just view this pragmatically. Whenever someone does something wrong and deep down it bothers him, he manifests an air of indifference – sometimes even joy –to show that he does not care, but he is crying inside! I do not believe that those who as a result of “circumstances” made poor choices in their lives – thereby causing the alienation and eventual extinction of their future progeny from a life of Torah – are really proud of, or happy about, their decision. I think that they cry bitter tears, constantly! It is difficult to cry publicly and admit, “I erred.

I was a fool.” Instead, they act happy and content with their lives. But it is all a miserable façade. We may see what appears to be laughter, but they are really wailing.