

ON CUE

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Not often does G-d Almighty tell anybody to leave him alone. But then again, Moshe isn't everybody.

This week, Moshe recounts the sad tale of the Golden Calf. Moshe had promised to return from Mount Sinai after receiving the Torah in forty days, but the Jews miscalculated. According to their calculations, he was late. Fearing that Moshe would never return from his celestial mission, the Jews made themselves a golden calf and worshipped it while proclaiming, "this is our god that took us out of Egypt." Obviously, the calculations and miscalculations of the Jewish People are not as simple as they appear on the surface. That, however is an entirely different issue.

I'd like to focus in on the aftermath of the calamity of the Golden Calf. Hashem actually wanted to destroy the Jewish Nation and rebuild a new folk with Moshe, as its patriarchal leader. "Release me," said G-d, "and I will destroy them and build a new nation from you" (Deuteronomy 9:14)). Immediately after the words, "release me" Moshe sprung into action. In the Book of Exodus, it details how Moshe pleaded, cajoled, and reasoned with Hashem with a multitude of persuasive arguments that calmed His wrath. The Jews were spared.

What is troubling is Moshe's chutzpah. Didn't Hashem specifically tell him, "leave me alone"? What prompted him with the audacity to defy a direct command of Hashem?

Herbert Tenzer served as a distinguished congressman from New York in the 1960s. More importantly, he was an observant Jew who was a proud activist and was instrumental in providing relief for many Holocaust survivors. A few months before his passing, some years ago, he related to me the following story:

The energetic and often outspoken Rabbi Eliezer Silver of Cincinnati, Ohio was a prominent force in the Vaad Hatzallah Rescue Committee. He worked tirelessly throughout the terrible war years and their aftermath to save and place the victims of Nazi depravity. In addition to his prominence in the Jewish world, Rabbi Silver enjoyed a personal relationship with the very powerful Senator Robert Taft of Ohio.

Rabbi Silver had a very difficult request that needed much political pressure and persuasion to accomplish. He asked Mr. Tenzer to accompany him to the Senator.

"Shenator Taft!" he exclaimed, mixing his distinct accent in which the s would sound as sh, with a high pitched intoning of emotions. I have a very important and difficult requesht!"

Rabbi Silver went on to plead his case of obtaining a certain number of visas for some refugees who may not have met all the criteria. Senator Taft looked nonchalant and non-committal. The Senator thought for a while then grimaced. He slowly and carefully stretched his response. "It would be arduous and burdensome," he began. "but technically," he continued, implying all the while that he was not the least bit anxious to get his hands dirty, "it can be done."

But Rabbi Silver did not hear anything except the last three words.

"IT CAN BE DONE?" He shouted with joy. "SHO DO IT!" Needless to say the stunned Senator got to work immediately and obtained the visas for the beleaguered Jews.

Moshe heard one line from Hashem, "leave me alone, and I will destroy them." That was his cue. The Talmud in Berachos explains that hearing those words, Moshe knew that now it all depended on him. The only way Hashem would destroy His people was if Moshe left him alone. And he didn't. Moshe badgered, cajoled, and pleaded with the Almighty and we were spared.

My Rebbe once quoted legendary slugger Ted Williams, the last player to achieve a batting average of over .400. "Every player gets one pitch that he definitely can hit. To hit .400, don't miss that pitch." Instead of recoiling at the words "release me" or "leave me be," Moshe saw his pitch. And he hit it awfully hard.

In life there are many cues. This week Moshe teaches his nation that when you get your cue, don't miss it. Even if it takes a little chutzpah.

***Dedicated by B. David & Shani Schreiber in memory of Naomi BasSheva Bas Rav Boruch Yosef of blessed memory
Good Shabbos!***

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