

Oftentimes leadership arises in the vacuum created by the most profound of tragedies. Who will step to the forefront and lead the recovery process are the questions that would-be leaders must strive to answer. The Jews do not lack for tragic episodes and in the aftermath of the first great tragedy, the sin of the golden calf, a new and impressive group of leaders arose, the Levites. The Torah tells us following the creation of the golden calf, Moshe saw the celebratory, idolatrous, worship and called out to the people, "Mi laHashem elay, whoever is for G-D, come to me." The verse concludes that the sole respondents to this religious call were the Levites, as the Torah tells us, "V'yaiasfu alav bnei Levi, and all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him."

The Gerrer Rebbe wonders why only the Levites responded to Moshe's call. Only 3000 Jews worshipped the calf, the other 99% of the Jewish population had no desire to throw their precious jewelry into the flames and watch Aaron mold a calf out of their gold. They never even entertained the notion of serving a golden statue, so why were they hesitant to answer Moshe's call? They too should have responded to the call for G-D. They too should have filled the vacuum and assumed positions of leadership. Why did only the tribe of Levi heed the call to G-D?

The Rebbe explains that while there may have been wise, pious, and G-D fearing individuals amongst the other tribes, they lacked the capacity for leadership that defined the tribe of Levi. The Gerrer Rebbe calls this trait *oz*, an inner strength. It is an ability to stand up and take action without questioning whether he is righteous or worthy enough to take this stand. It is courage to not let false humility dissuade his bold actions. It is the tenacity to stand up for what is right without regard for public opinion, consequence or embarrassment. It is the essence of successful leadership.

The Talmud tells us the apocalyptic tale of Kamtza and bar Kamtza, which ultimately led to the destruction of the second Temple and the decimation of the Jewish people. A certain individual wished to throw a party and he sent out an invite to his good friend Kamtza, however the invitation inadvertently reached Bar Kamtza, who just so happened to be an enemy of the party-thrower. Bar Kamtza attended the party assuming that the invitation was an attempt at reconciliation. Unfortunately, his assumption proved a colossal lapse in judgment. When the party thrower saw Bar Kamtza crashing his party he immediately asked him to leave. Bar Kamtza attempted to negotiate his continued attendance at the party, but to no avail, his presence apparently so distressed the party-thrower that he had Bar Kamtza shamefully escorted from the party. The Talmud tells us that Bar Kamtza was so incensed that the Rabbis who were sitting right there at the party and witnessed his horrifying mistreatment, yet made nary an attempt to prevent this public humiliation and instead let this travesty occur. He swore revenge against his fellow Jews and devised a heinous plot to slander the Jewish nation and accuse them of treason against the Rome. Ultimately bar Kamtza's vengeful scheme bore its intended fruit and the Temple was destroyed and the surviving Jews were exiled to Rome.

Certainly there are no shortages of villains in this incredible tale. The party-thrower acted in a thoughtless, barbaric fashion. Obviously, bar Kamtza might have slightly overreacted. Yet, I believe the biggest villains in this tale are the Rabbis. They are our moral compass, if they do not have the strength, fortitude and courage to stand up and do what is right, who will? They must be willing to say "This is wrong, it must stop." Being an innocent bystander is not an option for anyone, but for the Rabbis it is a calamity and the downfall of our people.

After the sin of the golden calf, only the Levites answered the call of who is for G-D. At that moment in history the Levites assumed the mantle of leadership. That mantle, though, presently rests in all of our hands. We can no longer expect only the Levites, or the rabbis to answer the call of duty. Every day each of us are asked this very same question, who is for G-D? Will we stand by and watch while others are suffering, or will we stand up and protest? Will we find the inner strength and courage to answer the call, or will we claim unworthiness as a viable excuse?

The right answer is never the easy answer, but as the Levites showed, it is the only answer.

**Shabbat Shalom
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