

## **When Pharaoh will say to you. deliver a proof, then say to Aharon; take your staff and cast it before Pharaoh and it will turn into a crocodile." (7:9)**

In the *Midrash*, *Chazal* ask, "Why specifically did this miracle of the staff turning into a crocodile occur?" They respond that Pharaoh is compared to a crocodile. They cite the following *pasuk* in *Sefer Yechezkel* (29:3) - *uhruth lu,c .curv kusdv ohb,vw A great animal of the sea which rests peacefully in its stream. Pharaoh said, "If the son of Abraham will come to me, I shall kill him."* When Moshe came to him, Pharaoh at once became as ineffective as a staff. We suggest that *Chazal's* comparison of Pharaoh to a crocodile, who lies peacefully in the water awaiting its prey, conveys a powerful message. One who stays away from the stream, which is home to the crocodile, is safe from the crocodile's predatory jaws. The Jew should be aware that separatism is not an indication of weakness and that isolationism does not suggest impuissance. Indeed, one needs a great deal of moral courage to assert one's opinion in the face of contending majority.

The *Bais Halevi* writes that whenever Jews attempt to assimilate, Hashem renews the differentiation by filling the hearts of the gentiles with hatred. This incitement accrues to our benefit, for it affirms the distinction between *Am Yisrael* and other nations throughout the generations. The gentiles' antagonism towards the Jew serves to keep the peoples separate and to facilitate our redemption. Alas, due to his alienation from *Torah* and *mitzvos*, the apologetic Jew lacks true pride in his Jewish heritage, cowering in his attempt to assimilate. If such individuals would only realize that the "crocodile" lies in waiting, prepared to devour his naive prey. The "crocodile" is turned into a staff only as a result of Hashem's beneficence, enabling us to exist in peace among the nations of the world.