

Aharon cast down his staff before Pharaoh...and it became a snake...and they too, the magicians of Egypt, did so with their incantations...and the staff of Aharon swallowed their staffs. (7:10, 11, 12)

Moshe came before Pharaoh and demanded that the Jews be released from slavery, so that they might serve Hashem. Pharaoh responded in the expected manner, questioning who is Hashem who is and what powers He has that would impress him. Moshe asked Aharon to throw his staff down before Pharaoh, and it was transformed into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed. Indeed, he called out his magicians, who duplicated Aharon's miracle. Egypt was the center of magic and necromancy. Such a feat was child's play for the Egyptians. To prove this point, Pharaoh called out his wife, who transformed a staff into a snake. He then called out a number of Egyptian youngsters, who also performed this magic. Observing all of this, Moshe had Aharon's staff, which had reverted to its original state, swallow up the Egyptian staffs. Upon seeing this, Pharaoh became anxious, saying to himself, "Next his staff will swallow me too!"

Why did Hashem have Moshe use this miracle as his "greeting" to Pharaoh? Certainly, Hashem could have had Moshe perform another miracle, one that would leave a more compelling impression upon Pharaoh. What message was Hashem sending to Pharaoh with this miracle?

Horav Avraham Kilav, Shlita, explains that the Egyptian magicians prided themselves upon their ability to perform magic. The Egyptian sorcerers were by far the most proficient in the world. They delved in all areas of spiritual impurity, seeking to learn as much as they could about black magic and witchcraft. They taught this way of life to their children. They thought that being proficient in this area gave them supremacy over the Jews who were a slave nation, unintellectual, not versed in magic and other areas of sorcery. They felt they were on top of the world.

How could Moshe have the nerve to ask them to release the Jews? Instead, Pharaoh decreed that the Jews work harder by making their own bricks. He called them a lazy nation who had no ability to understand the scope of serving a G-d. Pharaoh derided Moshe, "You want them to leave to serve G-d - I say they should be given more work!" Keep them involved in the physical/mundane dimension. That is where they belong."

This attitude prevailed until Aharon's *mateh*, staff, swallowed the Egyptian staffs. This miracle indicated to Pharaoh that there was a deeper lesson to be derived from Moshe's miracle. The staff was a piece of wood - simple wood - like the "simple" Jews. When Hashem so wants, however, this piece of wood would swallow up the Egyptian serpents. Nothing can stand in the way of Hashem - not even Pharaoh. If it pleases Hashem, Aharon's staff would also swallow Pharaoh, who is characterized by the *Midrash* as the *tanin ha'gadol*, large serpent. Yes, Pharaoh, the miracle of the snake was designed to impress upon you that if *Klal Yisrael* is not released, you, the

large serpent, are next!