

"And take this staff in your hand with which you shall perform the signs." (4:17)

Up until this point Hashem had not yet instructed Moshe to perform any specific act with the signs He had shown him. At this juncture, Hashem told Moshe to take the staff with him and then use it to perform the various "signs", indicating that he was Hashem's messenger. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, explains the significance of these signs and the manner in which they communicated to Pharaoh his own inadequacy, and his need to rely upon Hashem. Man acknowledges that he may not have the power to control his destiny. He does, however, believe he has the capacity to wield control over his "own" staff. It "belongs" to him, so he can do with it as he wishes. Hashem's message to Pharaoh was very simple --You are wrong!

The very staff that you hold in your hand, that you think is yours to do with as you please, will be turned into a snake by Hashem. The second message goes one step further. Not only are you powerless to control the staff in your hand, but even your hand is not under your control. At Hashem's will, your hand can immediately be enveloped with leprosy. Pharaoh may think he is god, but he will soon have a rude awakening. He will realize that he has no control whatsoever unless Hashem desires it to be so.

Horav Elyakim Schlesinger, Shlita, adds that herein lies the underlying message of *makas dam*, the plague of blood. Even if Pharaoh were willing to concede that he had no real power over his belongings or his own body, he still relied upon his god, the great idol known as the Nile River, to be the support system upon which he depended. Hashem discouraged this line of thinking by transforming the Nile River into blood, thereby demonstrating the helplessness of Pharaoh's god. These straightforward, but profound messages seemed to be unheeded by Pharaoh, necessitating further "lessons" from Hashem.