

The necromancers of Egypt did the same by means of their incantations. (7:22)

Pharaoh did not heed Moshe *Rabbeinu's* warning. Hashem instructed Moshe to have Aharon strike the Nile and stretch out his hand to bring the plague of *dam*, blood, all over the land. The reaction of Pharaoh and his magicians defies comprehension: they also demonstrated the magical ability to transform the water into blood. Is this sane? Imagine a fire breaks out in a city inhabited primarily by imbeciles. So what do the imbeciles do in reaction to the fire that has broken out in one end of the city? They start another fire in the other end of the city! Is this not what happened in Egypt? Moshe turned the water into blood. Rather than attempt to counter Moshe's plague and somehow turn the blood back into water, the imbeciles create more blood! Totally ludicrous!

Let us first address the question that is on everyone's lips: Why blood? Ten plagues struck Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Why did Hashem select blood to be the first plague? Hashem does nothing without a reason that imparts a message. What is the message of the blood?

Horav Nachman Breslover, zl (Likutei MoHaran), explains that the primary concept of *teshuvah*, repentance/return, is achieved when a person hears his humiliation, accepts it silently, and, yet, *v'yidom v'yishtok*, remains mute and silent. The Egyptian Pharaoh and magicians could have altered the course of history by acquiescing to Moshe and Aharon's message of the blood. Instead, like a bunch of fools, they made more blood. It was not the blood which Moshe was underscoring, but the *dam* related to *yidom*, mute, that he attempted to convey to them. Keep your mouth shut. Accept the humiliation with dignity and remain silent. This is your chance to make it good. Instead, they made more blood!

Are we any different? We reach out to those who are distant from Torah and *mitzvos*. They see clearly that the path they have chosen to live is doomed. Yet, they make more blood and continue living the way they have – with absolutely nothing to show for it. All one has to do is ask: "What do you do that is remotely Jewish?" They have no answers, because the answer is "nothing."

Rav Lazar Brody calls attention to the word *chartum*, which is also translated as nose. A fool is someone who cannot see beyond his nose. His vision is myopic and stigmatized. The *chartumei Mitzrayim*, Egyptian magicians, looked at the truth, but refused to see it. They ignored its message, because it meant acquiescing and confessing to having wasted their lives believing in a worthless pagan. They were unable to transform the blood back into water. They could only make more blood.

The *baal teshuvah* transforms the passion/anger of blood (when he listens to his humiliation and remains silent) into water. *Ikar ha'teshuvah she'yishma biziyo v'yishtok*. Had Pharaoh kept his mouth shut, had he accepted Heavenly justice with acquiescence and love, he would have emerged a king who became a penitent, who transformed blood to water. As a result of his

obstinacy, he was “awarded” nine more plagues, and he lived to see his nation devastated.

The *Pele Yoetz* writes, “A person who is humiliated should sit quietly alone and remain silent (in acceptance of his shame). Not only should he be quiet, he should not in any way manifest anger (of any sort) in response to his humiliation.” This is a tall order. It is one thing to quietly reconcile to humiliation, it is totally another not to become angered by it. When one thinks about the reward that he will receive, however, it likely compensates for it.

Horav Chizkiyah Medini, zl, was a Torah scholar without peer. He is remembered for his extraordinary anthology on *halachah*, an 18 volume encyclopedia entitled, *Sdei Chemed*. Even in contemporary times, with computer search engines that have access to thousands of *sefarim*, the *Sdei Chemed* stands out as a work of sheer brilliance, representing a Torah scholar who had access to the entire corpus of Torah literature. This set of *sefarim* received widespread acclaim by a world of Torah scholars who were the greatest and most knowledgeable pundits of their respective generations. Rarely has a volume of Torah literature received such outstanding unanimous praise. The author attributed this unusual attention to an incident that happened to him when he was younger, and for which he felt the *Sdei Chemed* was his Heavenly reward.

Rav Chizkiyah was a member of a *kollel* comprised of prodigious young scholars, of which he was among the elite. His exceptional *hasmadah*, diligence in study, coupled with his uncanny scholarship, caused him to stand out among his peers. When *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 4:28) teach that *kinaah*, *taavah* and *kavod*, “jealousy, desire and pursuit of honor drive a person from this world,” they are not referring only to people of base character; even scholars who are devoted to Torah study are able to fall prey to these character flaws. Thus, we understand that another member of this *kollel* could have been consumed with envy over all the attention given to the young *Rav Chizkiyah*. Envy is a shameful character trait, and, when one is envious, he should swallow his pride and move on. Sadly, this tormented fellow could not live unless he succeeded in destroying *Rav Chizkiyah*’s life. He bribed a young woman who cleaned the *kollel* premises to spread false rumors concerning an illicit relationship she had with *Rav Chizkiyah*. The community was in an uproar. (This was in a time when morality had meaning.) The *Sdei Chemed* did not respond at all to the charges, remaining mute as if nothing had occurred. He swallowed the shame and moved about with business as usual. Even after the