

The necromancers could not stand before Moshe because of the boils ... Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh. (9:11,12)

Concerning the previous plagues, the Torah writes that Pharaoh personally strengthened/hardened his heart. Regarding *makkas shechin*, boils, the Torah attests, *Va'yichazek Hashem es lev Pharaoh*, "Hashem strengthened Pharaoh's heart." What had transpired to catalyze this change? *Ramban* explains that as long as he was surrounded by his magicians, Pharaoh was ashamed to concede the truth: he had lost control. Hashem was stronger. The Jewish people should be permitted to leave. Pharaoh the *rasha*, wicked, would never allow anyone to observe him in a moment of weakness. It might denigrate their perception of him as a deity. When Egypt was stricken with boils, however, even the magicians left the palace. They were in pain and emitting a noxious odor from the ugly boils that covered their entire bodies. Pharaoh was now alone, with no one to impress, no peer pressure. He was about to concede defeat, to admit that Hashem was righteous and the Jews should be allowed to leave. Hashem was not yet prepared to allow them to leave. Four more plagues awaited the Egyptians, and then the Jews would leave. In order to prevent Pharaoh from capitulating, Hashem strengthened his heart.

For the first five *makkos*, Pharaoh was compelled to put on a show to demonstrate to his followers that nothing and no one could sway him. He was the strongest. When *makkas shechin* struck, he was alone and could finally confess that he was powerless against Hashem. The Almighty, however, had different plans for the despot.

Horav Nissim Yagen, zl, draws a distinction between the likes of Pharaoh and his ilk and our Torah leaders. Yehudah was confronted with the greatest challenge to his leadership. Tamar had proof of their liaison. The woman that Yehudah (as head of the *Bais Din*) had ruled guilty of an indiscretion and sentenced to death by fire was actually carrying his twin sons. He, too, was involved. When he realized this, he proclaimed, *Tzadkah mimeni*, "She is right. It is from me" (*Bereishis* 138:26). We are called *Yehudim* because of Yehudah's act of confession. He did not cover up his mistakes (as has become so common in today's society). Yehudah could have secretly come to Tamar and said, "Look, I see what you are intimating. You understand, of course, that to admit my involvement publicly may harm my reputation. I will *pasken*, rule, that you are not to be executed, and we will go our separate ways. Nobody gets hurt."

Yehudah, our namesake, was not like that. In the presence of his father, Yaakov *Avinu*, and his brothers, the *Shivtei Kah*, Yehudah admitted that he had made a mistake. This is the symbol of greatness. Accepting one's limitations is every bit as important as embracing one's strengths. Our egos control us; thus, we think that our peers will view us askance, which is, of course, unacceptable to us. We, therefore, look to Yehudah for guidance and inspiration, because, after all, we are *Yehudim*.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, writes, “It is the *teva ha’adam*, nature of a person, to justify himself even if he is wrong, because the idea of admitting without being ashamed (*Rashi, Vayikra 10:20*) is difficult and intimidating.” (‘I am sorry’ are the most difficult words to express.) The following story demonstrates that *hodaah al ha’emes*, conceding the truth, regardless of how unpleasant the ramifications may be, defines not only *malchus*, monarchy, (as it did Yehudah) but it is also the barometer of *mentchlichkeit*, humaneness.

On June 2, 2010, Armando Gallaraga pitched what seemed a perfect game, an achievement attained by only twenty pitchers in major league baseball’s 130-year history. This young man was going into the history books. The entire stadium watched with bated breath as the last play of the game was about to occur. The umpire, 65-year-old Jim Joyce, erroneously called the runner safe at first base. It was obviously a mistake, but rules are rules. After the game, realizing the mistake he made and its ramifications to the young pitcher, he walked over to Gallaraga and, with tears in his eyes, apologized profusely. He admitted that he had made a terrible mistake. The pitcher graciously accepted his apology saying, “Nobody is perfect. Everybody is human.” From a Torah perspective, I would say, “Hashem decides what should happen. We are the players. He decides our roles.”