

“Stretch out your hand and grasp its tail.” (4:4)

Hashem prepared Moshe *Rabbeinu* with signs/miracles to demonstrate to Pharaoh His powers. He was to take the *Mateh Elokim*, holy staff – given to him by Hashem – and throw it before Pharaoh, and it would become a serpent. He was then instructed to grab the serpent’s tail, and it would turn back into the *Mateh*. We wonder why Hashem insisted that Moshe grasp the serpent by its tail? Does the tail have significance?

The *Kli Yakar* views the entire miracle as a simile, a lesson about *Klal Yisrael*. The signs that Hashem chose were certainly by design. Each one had a symbolism; each one served as a lesson to Pharaoh.

The *Mateh Elokim* that was transformed into a lowly serpent signified *Klal Yisrael* at its nadir. At first, it was a proud nation, standing erect and firm as a staff. During its tenure in the moral filth of Egypt, living in an environment where debauchery was a way of life and sin was a matter of choice, they fell to the depths of depravity – symbolized by the lowly serpent, standard bearer of evil. It slithers on the dirt and makes its home in its filth. Indeed, as the serpent was punished and degraded as a result of its involvement and promotion of *lashon hara*, evil speech, so, too, were the Jews in Egypt deposed from spiritual distinction because there were informers and slanderers among them. How does one remedy such a situation? How can *Klal Yisrael* rise from the depths to enjoy spiritual superiority once again? How can the serpent once again become the staff of God? They must rebel! It is incumbent upon them to straighten themselves, so that they no longer bend to the lowliness of Egyptian culture.

This is not, however, Hashem’s way. His thoughts are quite different from ours. Hashem instructed Moshe to grasp hold of the serpent’s tail – not to raise its head! Do not straighten yourselves out. On the contrary - take hold of the tail. When *Klal Yisrael* has descended to the nadir, then the salvation for which they thirst comes – *Me’ashpos yarim evyon*, “He raises the needy from the dust” (*Tehillim* 113). When the *evyon*, the one who is in dire need, falls to the depths, to the lowest level of spirituality, then, Hashem lifts him up and places him with those who are on the appropriate spiritual plane.

What appears to the human eye as the end of the spiritual rope, is in itself really the springboard for our salvation. Hashem knows that we cannot do it alone and He, therefore, assists us in return. He spiritually resuscitates us, because we have lapsed into a coma in which we no longer can fend for ourselves. It is specifically when it appears the most bleak that the seeds of hope and salvation are about to germinate and produce fruit.