

## Take this staff in your hand, that you may perform the miraculous signs with it. (4:17)

Moshe carried the *mateh Elokim*, staff of Hashem. It was the instrument that initiated the various plagues which assailed Egypt. One might think that this staff was “dedicated” to effecting punishment and exacting retribution. We see in the *Torah* that when the Jews arrived in Marah and were confronted with the challenge of having nothing to drink, this staff served a different function. The *Torah* tells us in *Shemos 17:5*, “And your staff, with which you struck the river, take in your hand.” *Rashi* cites the *Mechilta* which takes note of the *Torah*’s emphasis on the staff “with which you struck the river.” When *Bnei Yisrael* were clamoring for water, Hashem said to Moshe, “Take the same staff that you used to bring plagues upon Egypt, and strike the rock with it, and water shall come out.” Let *Bnei Yisrael* see that the same staff which catalyzed plagues can also bring good. No dichotomy exists between the staff that brings evil and the one that brings good. Hashem is the source of both, and from Him only good emanates. We do not always perceive the good within the “bad.” We do not always perceive that out of sorrow and suffering emerge joy and happiness. It is necessary to have faith that the staff of evil will effect good. Indeed, the good is there--we have only to recognize it.

We may use yet another approach to understanding the words of *Chazal*. Every situation/occurrence which we experience, be it sad and tragic or festive and joyful, comes from Hashem for a specific reason. Consequently, we are obligated to recognize the good as well as the bad. *Chazal* teach us not to attribute the bad to another source. No, the good and the bad are both present to serve a purpose--to sanctify Hashem’s Name and to inspire us to notice.

In referring to *Tisha B’Av*, our national day of sorrow, *Yermiah ha’Navi* calls it “*moed*,” a word which is usually used in reference to a festival. This seeming inconsistency is explained by **Horav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, zl**, in the following manner: The word *moed* is derived from the word *va’ad*, which means appointment. A *moed* is thus a time set aside when Hashem has an “appointment” with the world, when His presence and greatness are manifest.

We can acknowledge Hashem’s eminence from two distinct perspectives: Through the miracles of redemption with the joy and happiness they bring; and through destruction with its accompanying pain and sorrow. The glorious exodus from Egypt inspired a nation to perceive *gadlus Ha’Boreh*, the greatness of Hashem, the Creator. Likewise, the devastating *churban*, destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash* -- with the ensuing slaughter of Jewish life -- was such a catastrophic tragedy that it could only have occurred as part of a Divine plan. These two distinct empirical moments in history, *geulah*, redemption, and *churban*, destruction, both constituted appointments with Hashem, moments when His presence was uniquely manifest. The staff of evil and the staff of good are one and the same. We only have to perceive its message. Our task is to uncover its positive/constructive message.