

How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? (10:3)

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, asks, if we were to bring Pharaoh to trial before the International Court in The Hague -- what would this evil man be convicted of? Pharaoh's sins were monstrous, even by the standards of the most brutal, sadistic tyrants of history. Mass murder, enslavement, cruelty beyond imagination – all crimes against humanity, deserving of the most painful punishment. Yet, the Torah does not list these atrocities as an indictment against Pharaoh. The only thing the Torah writes is: "You refused!" Pharaoh refused to acknowledge Hashem as the One behind the punishment. He ignored the obvious Presence of Hashem in all that was transpiring in Egypt.

Veritably, Pharaoh was guilty of the most heinous crimes against humanity, but what was the root of his evil? The crimes that he committed were a manifestation of the reason for his commission of these terrible crimes. He refused to humble his heart to accept and heed His word. *Rav Shteinman* explains that this passage reveals the source of all sin: refusal to submit to Hashem. The arrogance one has that convinces him to ignore the Almighty, to refuse to submit to His reign, is the primary cause of sin – not only Pharaoh's, but ours as well.

When a person confronts hardship, how does he react? Does he remain unmoved, or does he ask himself, "What message is Hashem sending to me? Why?" When he is the beneficiary of extraordinary blessing, does he thank Hashem? Is his gratitude genuine and sincere, or nonexistent once he has received his favor? Does he attribute his success to his own ability, or does he acknowledge that, without Hashem, he would have nothing? All this falls under the rubric of *ad masai meiantem*? Only when one is willing to surrender to Hashem, to accept His total involvement in every aspect of his life, does he achieve true redemption.

A young Israeli entrepreneur had successfully built a high-tech company. His success was unusual, given that he started with very little capital. He worked hard and it paid off. Unfortunately, he neglected to remember the "Hashem-factor". Whatever success he achieved was due to Hashem's blessing. It had nothing to do with brains and brawn. Unfortunately, he began believing that his success was motivated by his input and savvy marketing. "it is all hard work – no miracles here" was his constant motto.

He made a number of investments, which on paper should have paid out handsomely. However, due to the market crash and a string of legal challenges his company was now on the verge of collapse. His wife was no fool. She understood that his good fortune led to his arrogance which, not only clouded his decisions, but it also short-circuited his otherwise rational thinking. He was a *frum*, observant, young man who should have acknowledged his fortune as a special Heavenly blessing. His wife urged him to travel to Bnei Brak and speak with *Horav Chaim Kanievsky* and petition him for a blessing. Somewhat reluctantly, he listened to his wife and met with *Rav Chaim*.

The *Sar HaTorah* received him warmly and listened quietly to his tale of woe. After recounting his troubles, *Rav Chaim* asked him gently, "Tell me, when the business was going well, did you thank Hashem?"

The man replied, "To be honest, I never thought about it. I always felt that my success was initiated by my acumen and hard work."

Rav Chaim countered, "When one forgets the true Source of all his blessing, Hashem sometimes reminds him. That reminder is not a punishment, but rather, a message of mercy. It is Hashem's way of saying, 'My child, return home.'"

The young man left shaken, because he knew that *Rav Chaim* was correct. He had the *seichel*, common sense, to listen, accept and change. Every morning before opening his laptop, he said, *Modeh Ani*, thanking Hashem for his beneficence. He *davened* with greater *kavanah* and began to attend a daily *shiur*. As his life changed, so did his success. He soon became a wealthy man once again, only this time he acknowledged the true Source of his success.

Every challenge, every struggle, every disappointment, carries within it a whisper, "*Ad masai?* How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?" The wise person hears and heeds that whisper. He acknowledges his error and changes course. How fortunate is he who listens.