

# A GLOBAL CATASTROPHE

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

Why did HASHEM bring certain types of plagues upon the Egyptians? Why, for example, fill a river with blood? The Midrash Hagadol answers, "Because they threw the children of Israel into the water as it says, "All new born males you should toss them into the river." And therefore they were judged with the water of the river." Alternately, Lekach Tov says, "Because they spilled the blood of Israel like water, their river was turned into blood and their water became undrinkable. (Lekach Tov)

The Midrash catalogues and explains the context for the "Ten Plagues" with the aim to point out that each hit was not just a punishment but a message encoded in symbolic language to communicate to those who would bother to look for meaning. One of the many important keys that "open up" not just many passages in the Torah but our very lives is the "measure for measure" principle. Sooner or later whatever we do comes back to help or haunt.

Again, why was the river of Egypt choked with blood? Had they spilled that much Jewish blood? Emphatically, yes! When Cain killed his brother Abel early on in human history, G-d approached him and asked, "What did you do? The voice of- the bloods of your brother cry out to Me from the earth." Why does The Almighty refer to the "bloods" and not simply "the blood" as we would normally speak? Rashi succinctly states, "His blood and the blood of his offspring!" This is astounding!

When Cain killed his brother he also killed all his future generations as well. The full scope of the act is implied in the word "bloods". Let us calculate with the assumption that Abel would have been just as prolific in having children as brother Seth would later be. The whole world's population present and past emanates from him almost exclusively. That means that he killed billions and billions of people adding up over the course of generations. The ever widening angle of emptiness created by that single act of indiscretion is too frightening to face.

When the Egyptians awoke one morning to find rivers of blood flowing through their country they were being made to recognize the full impact of their crime against the Children of Israel. How many innocent ones they snuffed out in their infancy, killing not only them but future generations too? No crime of that magnitude can remain an isolated incident. They may have justified it albeit perversely and myopically minimized its importance but when all that blood rushed in their midst they were shown with a portion of the full measure of the "bloods" they had recklessly spilt. In that sense each plague was not merely punitive but poignant, as well.

The study of "measure for measure" searches for consequences and matching causes. Surely only a

great sage or a prophet can really tell which explosion and the shedding of which "bloods", is ultimately responsible for a growing wave of destruction that carries beyond its intended boundaries and in the shadow of whose good deeds we gained today. In Pharaoh's mind, and Cain's too, they merely sought to solve some local- immediate problem but in the end they invited a global catastrophe. Text Copyright &copy 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.