

TO FIX OUR ATTENTION

by Rabbi Label Lam

So says HASHEM, "Through this shall you know that I am HASHEM; behold with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the waters that are in the River and they will change to blood. The fish-life that is in the water will die and the River will become foul. Egypt will become weary of trying to drink water from the River. (Shemos 7:17-18)

Pharaoh is getting his first introduction to HASHEM. It's hard not to notice that the method is a little rugged. Maybe, because Pharaoh is extra hardnosed and living in deep denial and therefore he needs an extra dose of reality. It makes sense to shock him with a plague or ten. However, we understand that the plagues were not meant to convince Pharaoh alone, but the entire Jewish Nation as well. How and why does this method of muddying the waters of Egypt work so well?

A city council hired an artist to make a statue for the central park. The artist was offered a handsome sum of money for his work. He labored to create a marvelously lifelike image of a horse. It was such a perfect replica that passersby would hardly notice that it was statue. This became a point of contention for the city council that had commissioned the artist and promised him generous recompense for his craft. After all, as politicians, they wanted to gain some reflected glory for their efforts to beautify the park and all was going completely unnoticed. The artist, they complained, had done too good of a job. The horse was too real in appearance and casual observers were incapable telling the difference between it and the real thing. They complained to the artist threatening to halt his payment unless he made some correction. What was he to do? His statue was perfect. What improvement could he possibly make? After a short period of time he arrived at a solution. He went to the park with a hammer and chisel in hand and surgically he stuck at and knocked off the nose of his beautiful statue rendering it seriously and obviously flawed.

Soon small crowds gathered in the park and were seen taking serious notice of the statue. One was heard saying to another, "What a beautiful statue of a horse!" The other one answered, "Too bad the nose is broken!"

The Chovos HaLevavos in his introduction to Shaar HaBechina, the Gate of Investigation, lists three reasons one may naturally fail to recognize the great goodness woven into every detail of creation. The summary of the second reason is that HASHEM makes the world run in a predictable and orderly fashion. It is precisely because the goodness is so reliable and consistent that we are rocked to sleep by the steady rhythm of its delivery. A baby is formed from a single cell and after nine months is a marvelous composite of three trillion cells. The first year of life the weight doubles. By

the time the child has achieves full stature there are approximately 60 trillion cells running to perform their individual tasks below the radar of our conscious mind. We might tend to call it nature. Nature really means repeating miracles. When something occurs once in history, like the splitting of the sea, then we call it miraculous. If it happens every day and twice on Sunday as a matinee then few would ever take notice.

That's the problem. The good is too darn good. How is The Creator to grab the attention of man? Well, it seems that the sometimes the only way interrupt the habit of living habitual and shallow is a subtle shock treatment that arrests the attention of individual or the entire world. When one small group of cells fails to cooperate, G-d forbid, the person finds themselves praying for mercy, while seeking treatments at Sloan Kettering. When a plane fails to reach its destination in one piece then everyone is amazed that anyone emerges whole. When the Nile River, the main economic artery in Egypt clots with blood, even for a week, then we and even Pharaoh have a better chance of knowing that there is a G-d. Too bad it has to be broken first to fix our attention. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).