



## A Valuable Lesson Learned from Moshe Rabeinu's Staff

# To Thwart the Yetzer HaRa Who Is the Primeval Serpent We Must Always Have Our Staffs Ready to Combats Him and Believe Wholeheartedly that Hashem Will Assist Us

This week's parsha is parshas Shemos. We will focus on the incredible feats HKB"H performed with Moshe's staff to convince Bnei Yisrael that Moshe was sent to take them out of Mitzrayim (Shemos 4, 1):

וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהֵן לֹא יֵאֱמִינּוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו ה' מִזֶּה זֶה בִּידֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה. וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וְיִשְׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וְיִהְיֶה לְנַחֵשׁ וַיִּנְס מֹשֶׁה מִפָּנָיו. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה שְׁלַח יָדְךָ וְאֶחָזֵז בְּזַנְבּוֹ, וְיִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּחָזֵק בּוֹ וַיְהִי לְמִטָּה בְּכַפּוֹ. לְמַעַן יֵאֱמִינּוּ כִּי נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵם אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב."

**Moshe responded and said, "But they will not believe me, and they will not heed my voice, for they will say, 'Hashem did not appear to you.'" Hashem said to him, "What is that in your hand?" and he said, "A staff." He said, "Cast it to the ground," and he cast it to the ground, and it became a snake. Moshe fled from it. Hashem said to Moshe, "Stretch out your hand and grasp its tail." He stretched out his hand and grasped it tightly, and it became a staff in his palm. "So that they shall believe that Hashem, the G-d of their forefathers, appeared to you, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov."**

Now, our sacred sefarim teach us a fundamental principle: The Torah is eternal; it contains vital lessons appropriate for each and every generation concerning the best way to serve Hashem. Hence, we will focus on the significance of this feat performed with Moshe's staff; it turned into a snake, and when he grabbed its tail, it reverted back into a staff. What message was HKB"H conveying to Yisrael in Mitzrayim, and what lesson did He wish to convey to all future generations?

## This Amazing Staff Was Handed Down from Adam HaRishon until It Reached Moshe Rabeinu

We will begin our inquiry by referring to a Mishnah (Avos 5, 6): "עשרה דברים נבראו ערב שבת בין השמשות"—**ten things were created on Erev Shabbas at twilight.** One of the ten items enumerated is **"the staff."** Rashi clarifies: **It is referring to the staff of Moshe that had the ineffable name engraved on it. It lay ready until it was delivered to Moshe.** The Targum YoNasan (Shemos 2, 21) provides a similar clarification. He comments that Moshe's staff was the one created at twilight, had the exalted, ineffable name engraved on it, and was destined to be used to perform the feats in Mitzrayim.

Chazal reveal to us via their "ruach hakodesh" that this amazing staff had a remarkable journey from the time it was created until it reached the hands of Moshe Rabeinu. The Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 40) provides the details of its journey: **The staff that was created at twilight (at the end of the six days of creation) was given to Adam HaRishon in Gan Eden. Adam passed it on to Chanoch; Chanoch passed it on to Noach; Noach passed it on to Shem; Shem passed it on to Avraham; Avraham passed it on to Yitzchak; Yitzchak passed it on to Yaakov. Yaakov brought it down to Mitzrayim and passed it on to his son Yosef. When Yosef passed away, all of his household possessions were plundered and placed in Pharaoh's palace. Yisro, who was one of the Egyptian sorcerers, saw the staff with the letters (etched) on it, and**

**coveted it; he took it, brought it (home), and planted it in his home's garden . . . No one was able to approach it anymore. When Moshe came to his house, he went into the garden of Yisro's house, and saw the rod, and read the letters that were on it. He reached out with his hand and took it. Yisro saw Moshe and said: This one is destined to redeem Yisrael from Mitzrayim. Therefore, he gave him Zipporah, his daughter, as a wife.**

In the commentary of the brilliant Rabbi David Luria, ztz"l, the Radal, on the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (ibid. 7), he explains the meaning of the statement: : **The staff that was created at twilight was given to Adam HaRishon in Gan Eden.** As the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer explains himself: **Adam HaRishon entered Gan Eden in the seventh hour on Erev Shabbas . . . at twilight of Erev Shabbas, he was expelled and exited.**

This teaches us that the staff that was created on Erev Shabbas at twilight was presented to Adam HaRishon prior to his expulsion from Gan Eden during the same twilight that it was created. The Radal substantiates this by referring to what is brought down in the Sefer HaYashar and in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Parshas Shemos, end of Remez 168): **When Adam was expelled from Gan Eden, he took the staff in his hand and departed.**

Thus, it behooves us to consider the following questions: Why did HKB"H see fit to create this amazing staff on Erev Shabbas at twilight? What is the significance of the fact that it was handed down by Adam HaRishon from generation to generation until it landed in the hands of Moshe Rabeinu, who would use it to perform miraculous feats while liberating Yisrael from Mitzrayim?

**We Must Always Be Ready with the Staff in Hand to Strike the Yetzer HaRa Who Is Emboldened Daily**

We will begin by referring to a statement in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): **"יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו, שנאמר (תהלים לז-לב) צופה רשע לצדיק ומבקש להמיתו, ואלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אין יכול לו, שנאמר (שם) אלקים לא יעזבנו בידו."** **Man's yetzer overwhelms him every day and attempts to kill him . . . And if not for HKB"H, Who aids him, he**

**would be unable to withstand it . . .** This teaches us that a person must always be prepared and ready to combas the yetzer hara who assails him and overwhelms him daily. Hence, the Gemara elsewhere advises (Berachos 5a): **"לעולם ירגיז אדם יצר טוב על יצר הרע"—a person should constantly agitate his yetzer tov to fight against his yetzer hara.**

We can now begin to comprehend the wondrous ways of Hashem. On the very same Erev Shabbas Kodesh of creation at twilight, when Hashem expelled Adam HaRishon from Gan Eden for being duped by the nachash into partaking of the Eitz HaDa'as, He created the staff and presented it to Adam HaRishon. Thus, HKB"H performed a "po'el dimyon"—a symbolic gesture—to teach man that he should carry the staff with him throughout his life in Olam HaZeh. Man must constantly be vigilant and ready to battle and strike the yetzer hara, embodied by the nachash, who tries to ambush him every minute of every day.

This explains fantastically why HKB"H engraved the ineffable name on the staff that He presented to Adam HaRishon. He wished to teach Adam a vital lesson: If he carries the staff with him at all times to combas the yetzer hara, then even if he feels that he does not have the power to defeat it, he should rest assured that HKB"H will come to his rescue. This is the significance of the name of Hashem on the staff. This is the message conveyed by Chazal: **Man's yetzer overwhelms him every day and attempts to kill him . . . And if not for HKB"H, Who aids him, he would be unable to withstand it.**

Apropos this subject, we find a wonderful insight from the Chasam Sofer, zy"a in Toras Moshe (Ki Seitzei) related to the passuk (Devarim 21, 10): **"כי תצא למלחמה—על אויביך ונתנו ה' אלקיך בידך ושביית שביו"—when you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its people as captives.** Let us summarize his sacred words:

**It is written in Pirkei Avos (1, 14): "If am not for myself, who is for me? When I am for myself only, what and I? And if not now, when?" Now, Chazal said, "If not for HKB"H, Who aids him, he would be unable to withstand it (man's yetzer hara)." Now,**

a person might think that he should not go out to battle the yetzer hara to conquer it, which requires power and courage, as they taught (ibid. 4, 1): **“Who is a mighty hero? He who conquers his yetzer.”** So, he should not take any action to accomplish this but should simply rely on Hashem to assist him and fight this intense battle for him.

In truth, this is not so. Anyone who thinks this way will never have his enemy submit to him. A person must always fight to conquer his yetzer with his own power and natural abilities. The rest will come by divine assistance. As they stated (Shabbas 104a): **“If one comes to purify himself, they help him** (i.e., he receives divine assistance).” This is the message conveyed by Hillel: **“If I am not for myself, who is for me?”** In other words, if a person does not act on his own behalf, who will come to assist him? **“And when I am for myself,”** meaning after the person has acted, **“what is he”** (without the assistance of HKB”H)? **Both must work together as we have explained.**

He (Hillel) concludes: **“And if not now, when?”** In other words, if this person decides not to fight against the yetzer hara but rather to wait until he gets old and reaches a point in life when he no longer desires the pleasures of Olam HaZeh, then he will perform teshuvah and Hashem will show him mercy. However, they of blessed memory said (A.Z. 19a): **“Praiseworthy is the man who fears Hashem.”** This implies that when he is still a man with courage and vigor, he should complete the act. That is what is meant by **“if not now, when?”** . . . This is the message of the passuk we started with: **“When you go out to war against your enemies”—** it is referring to the war against the yetzer hara. In that situation, **“Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hands,”** since someone who comes to purify himself is assisted from above.

### **Moshe Rabeinu a Gilgul of Adam HaRishon Rectified the Neshamos of Yisrael Involved in the Cheit Eitz HaDa’as**

With this understanding, we will explain why Adam HaRishon bequeathed the staff that was given to him before he was expelled from Gan Eden to the generations

that followed. As we learned, it ultimately reached the hands of Moshe Rabeinu, who performed miraculous feats with it in Mitzrayim. We will refer to an important principle gleaned from the impeccable teachings of our teacher, the Arizal, in Sha’ar HaPesukim (Shemos). He explains why Yisrael were subjected to the difficult servitude and labor in the galus of Mitzrayim.

He explains in his unique, sacred way that when Adam HaRishon sinned with the Eitz HaDa’as, he introduced a fatal flaw into all of the neshamos that were included in his being. As a consequence, not only was he sentenced to death, but the death decree applied to all of the neshamos of Yisrael within him at the time of the historic sin. Nevertheless, we know that HKB”H wants all neshamos to achieve a tikun, as indicated by the passuk (Shmuel II 14, 14): **“וְחֹשֵׁב”** **מַחְשְׁבוֹת לְבַלְתִּי יָדַח מִמֶּנּוּ נִידָח—He ponders thoughts** (devises means), **so that no one will be banished from Him.** Therefore, it was orchestrated from above, due to His infinite mercy and kindness, for all of these neshamos go through a purification process.

Initially, they reincarnated into the generation of the mabul; however, they still behaved corruptly and were depraved. This is evident from the passuk (Bereishis 6, 5): **“וַיִּרְא ה' כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ—Hashem saw that saw that man’s wickedness on earth was great.** The passuk specifies **“רַעַת הָאָדָם”—alluding to “the wickedness of Adam,”** and that that generation continued in his sinful ways. Subsequently, they reincarnated into the generation of the dispersion—**“dor hapelagah”—**and remained guilty of avodah-zarah. This is evident from the passuk (ibid. 11, 5): **“וַיִּרַד ה' לְרֹאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת הַמְּגֹדֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם—Hashem descended to see the city and the tower which the sons of man (Adam) had built.** This passuk emphasizes the fact that they were descendants of Adam (HaRishon). They ultimately reincarnated into the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim. As a result of their extreme hardship and suffering, they were purified and rectified to the point that they were eventually worthy of receiving the Torah at Har Sinai.

This explains very nicely the punishments they received in Mitzrayim, which exemplify the principle of **“midah k’neged midah”—“measure for measure.”** The generation of the mabul were corrupt and depraved; therefore, they were exterminated in the waters of



the mabul. Correspondingly, in Mitzrayim, Pharaoh decreed (Shemos 1, 22): "כל הבן הילוד היאורה תשליכוהו"—**every male child that will be born, you shall throw him into the river.** The Torah describes the sin of the "dor hapelagah" as follows (Bereishis 11, 4): "הבה נלבנה"—**let us make bricks. . . to build the city and the tower.** Correspondingly, they were punished in Mitzrayim "midah k'neged midah" (Shemos 1, 14): "וימררו את חייהם בעבודה קשה בחומר ובלבנים"—**they embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks.** Lastly, corresponding to the city and tower they built in "dor hapelagah" (ibid. 11): "ויבן ערי מסכנות לפרעה את ביתום ואת רעמסס"—**it (Bnei Yisrael) built storage cities for Pharaoh, Pitom and Raamses.** Thus, we can conclude that the purpose of galus Mitzrayim was to rectify the neshamos that were damaged spiritually by the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as."

In keeping with this explanation, the Shela hakadosh (Shemos) explains why Yisrael were enslaved specifically in Mitzrayim under the rule of Pharaoh. For, we find that Pharaoh is referred to as "the great serpent" in the following passuk (Yechezkel 29, 3): "כה אמר ה' אלקים, הנני עליך פרעה מלך מצרים התנים הגדול הרובץ"—**thus said Hashem Elokim, "Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh, King of Mitzrayim, the great serpent (sea-monster) that crouches within its rivers (the Nile and its tributaries), who has said, 'Mine is my river, and I have made myself.'"** Pharaoh is the embodiment of the "nachash hakadmoni"—the serpent in Gan Eden that enticed Adam HaRishon to sin along with all of the neshamos within him. It was for this reason that the first feat Moshe Rabeinu performed before Pharaoh was having the staff turn into a serpent; this demonstrated that he could subjugate the nachash.

This enlightens us as to the wisdom and foresight of Adam HaRishon. He passed on the staff that was given to him by HKB"H as he was being expelled from Gan Eden to future generations. He was aware that all of the neshamos were contained within him when he committed the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as." Hence, the future leaders of Yisrael throughout the generations would be required to continue the process of tikun for the neshamos that had been stained by the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as." By holding the divine staff given to Adam by

HKB"H, they would educate the neshamos of Yisrael to wage a constant war against the yetzer hara.

### The Wonders and Feats Performed with Moshe's Staff Symbolize the War against the Yetzer HaRa

We can now begin to comprehend the wondrous ways of Hashem. He arranged for this special staff to end up specifically in the hands of Moshe Rabeinu, so that he could use it to perform those feats that would facilitate the exodus from Mitzrayim. As the Arizal explains in Likutei Torah (Ki Sisa): **Know that Moshe resembled Adam HaRishon; just as Adam HaRishon encompassed all of the neshamos in the world, so, too, Moshe was equivalent to all of Yisrael.**

It was precisely for this reason that HKB"H specifically chose Moshe Rabeinu to deliver Yisrael from Mitzrayim. Since Moshe was a gilgul and tikun of Adam HaRishon, who sinned with the Eitz HaDa'as, it was fitting for him to rectify the neshamos of Yisrael who were involved in that sin and had reincarnated into the neshamos in Mitzrayim. This explains very nicely why HKB"H arranged for the staff that was given to Adam HaRishon to end up in the hands of Moshe. Thus, Moshe could teach Yisrael that the tikun for the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as" is to always remain vigilant in the constant war against the yetzer hara—the malevolent serpent waiting to ambush man at every possible opportunity.

This also explains why HKB"H chose to have the miraculous feats in Mitzrayim performed with Moshe's staff. This was designed to inculcate in us the firm belief that the tzaddik possesses the power to alter the forces of nature and bring about the downfall of the reshaim. This is accomplished in the merit of the staff that he holds in his hand and brandishes to strike the yetzer hara. Therefore, when Moshe Rabeinu also wanted to overcome the klipah of Amalek, whose ministering angel is the yetzer hara, he informed Yehoshua (Shemos 17, 9): "מחר אנכי נצב על ראש הגבעה ומוטה"—**tomorrow, I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand.**

We can also apply this notion to suggest a very nice interpretation of Yaakov Avinu's statement (Bereishis 32, 11): "כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה"—**for with my staff I crossed this Yarden.** Rashi comments in the name of a Midrash Aggadah: **He placed his**

**staff in the Yarden, and the Yarden split.** As we learned from the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer above, the staff of Adam HaRishon also passed through the hands of Yaakov Avinu. In keeping with this discussion, we can postulate that Yaakov Avinu always carried the staff with him, so that he would be ready to combas the forces of tumah aligned with Eisav and Lavan. Hence, he possessed the power to alter the forces of nature and split the Yarden with the staff.

### He Threw It to the Ground and It Became a Snake

We can now begin to comprehend to some small degree the esoteric, heavenly conversation that took place between Moshe Rabeinu and HKB"H concerning the staff that turned into a snake. For, when HKB"H sent Moshe to inform Yisrael that HKB"H planned to extricate them from the tumah of Mitzrayim, Moshe understood that HKB"H intended for Yisrael to perform some sort of preparation themselves. Otherwise, merely informing them that HKB"H planned to take them out of Mitzrayim would serve no purpose.

Therefore, he protested to HKB"H (Shemos 4, 1): "וזהו לא יאמינו לי ולא ישמעו בקולי כי יאמרו לא נראה אליך ה'"—**but they will not believe me, and they will not heed my voice, for they will say, "Hashem did not appear to you."** Moshe was insinuating that because Yisrael had sunk to the 49<sup>th</sup> level of tumah, they would not believe that they possessed the capacity to combas and overcome the yetzer hara. Therefore, they would wonder why HKB"H bothered to send Moshe to inform them that He intended to take them out of Mitzrayim. After all, it would be entirely up to Hashem, since they felt that they did not possess the capacity and wherewithal to overcome the yetzer on their own.

Therefore, to convince Moshe (ibid. 2): "ויאמר אליו ה' מה: זה בידך—**Hashem said to him, "What is that in your hand?"** In other words, Hashem was asking him where the power he possessed to perform all of these wondrous feats on this mission came from. To which Moshe replied: "ויאמר מטה"—from the staff. Moshe understood that all of this power came exclusively from the staff that he always grasped in his hand, at the ready to strike the yetzer. Then, HKB"H said to Moshe: "השליכהו ארצה"—**cast it to the ground.** In this manner, HKB"H alluded to people's erroneous claim that since it is impossible to

overcome the yetzer without Hashem's help, why bother to hold onto the staff to strike the yetzer. Seemingly, it would be preferable to throw the staff to the ground and rely exclusively on Hashem to give them the necessary power to overcome the yetzer.

Then: "וישליכהו ארצה ויהי לנחש וינס משה מפניו"—**he cast it to the ground, and it became a snake.** Thus, HKB"H conveyed a vital lesson. The moment a Jew casts the staff from his hand and neglects to combas the yetzer, **"it becomes a snake"**—the yetzer hara, which is none other than the "nachash hakadmoni"; it arises to trap him in its net and cause his spiritual downfall. Because only if a Jew exerts all of his energy and power to combas the yetzer does he receive assistance from Hashem enabling him to overcome it.

### "Grab its tail" to Overcome the Nachash by Foreseeing Consequences

Proceeding along this sublime path, we will now focus on what happened after the staff turned into a snake: **Hashem said to Moshe, "Stretch out your hand and grasp its tail." He stretched out his hand and grasped it tightly, and it became a staff in his palm.** I believe that HKB"H is teaching us here an ingenious way to overcome the "nachash hakadmoni," alias yetzer hara. But first, let us introduce what the Maharal writes in Netivot Olam (Part 2, Netiv Koach HaYetzer, Chapter 4). He interprets a statement by the wisest of all men (Koheles 4, 13): "טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן"—**a poor but wise, young boy is preferable to an old and foolish king.** Rashi comments in the name of the Midrash: **The poor, wise boy is the yetzer tov. Why is it referred to as a young boy? Because it does not enter a person until he is thirteen years old. It is described as "poor" ("unfortunate"), because the bodily limbs do not heed it as they do the yetzer hara. It is described as "wise," because it guides man sensibly (intelligently) to do good. The king is the yetzer hara, who rules over all of the bodily limbs. It is described as "old," because it enters one's body at birth . . . It is described as "foolish," because it misleads a person to go astray, along a wayward path.**

We learn from the Maharal that the yetzer tov is portrayed as "חכם"—**wise**—based on the qualification

(Tamid 32a): "איזהו חכם הרואה את הנולד"—a truly wise person foresees the consequences of all his actions. He realizes that if he sins, he will ultimately be held accountable. Therefore, he does not fall prey to sin; and if he does sin, he performs teshuvah. When the yetzer hara persuades a person to commit an aveirah, the "wise" yetzer tov provides moral support. It encourages him not to be swayed or enticed by the glittery nonsense that surrounds us in Olam HaZeh. It helps a person realize that he is being deluded by his desires and cravings and will suffer the consequences. Instead, he sees the world with open, intelligent eyes; he realizes that ultimately we are all destined to die and that nothing will remain of the meaningless desires of Olam HaZeh.

Furthermore, because of the sensible, positive influence of the yetzer tov, a person realizes that HKB"H will hold him accountable for all of his actions. In the words of the Tanna, Akavya ben Mehalalel (Avos 3, 1): "ולפני מי אתה עתיד ליתן דין חשבון לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש: ברוך הוא—(know) before Whom you will be held accountable . . . Before the King of Kings, HKB"H. By considering future consequences, a person will avoid committing an aveirah. For this reason, the yetzer hara is depicted as a foolish, old king; because it introduces foolish whims in a person's mind that confound and displace his wisdom. Thus, he does not consider future consequences; instead, he is enticed by the glittery appeal of the present.

The explains beautifully a passuk in parshas Ha'azinu (Devarim 32, 28): "כי גוי אובד עצות המה ואין בהם תבונה, לו חכמו" —for they are a nation bereft of counsel, and there is no understanding in them. Were they wise, they would have comprehended this, they would have understood from their end.

In other words, the root cause of sin is not heeding the advice of the yetzer tov—the "חכם"—to consider the end result of an action--"לאחריתם"—like a "wise man who foresees the consequences." For, if people truly understand the consequences of their actions, they will not fall into the yetzer hara's trap; they will realize that it does not pay to sin.

We can now explain the end of the feat of the staff: Hashem said to Moshe, "Stretch out your hand and grasp its tail." HKB"H hinted that the best strategy when dealing with the yetzer hara is to grab it by its tail. In other words, emulate the wise man who considers the consequences of his actions. Do not look merely at present appearances but consider the matter all the way through, including future developments and ramifications. Realize that all matters of Olam HaZeh are merely empty, deceptive, false illusions. He stretched out his hand and grasped it tightly, and it became a staff in his palm. Then, "he stretched out his hand and grasped it tightly, and it became a staff in his palm"—by taking the future into consideration, he once again had a staff in the palm of his hand with which to strike the yetzer: "So that they shall believe that Hashem, the G-d of their forefathers, appeared to you, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov." This convinced the people that Moshe was their legitimate savior, since the source of the holy Avos's strength was their constant vigilance. They were always ready to battle the yetzer hara. In this merit, they succeeded in establishing the house of Yisrael, a people that would follow in their footsteps, until the end of time.

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