

In the previous Parasha [Shemot 4:3] HaShem involves Moshe in a miracle that would convince Bnei Yisrael of his authenticity as a messenger of G-d. He told Moshe to take his staff and throw it to the ground, whereupon it turned into a “*nachash*”, a “snake.” The fact that he was able to turn the staff into a snake and then back into a staff was enough to convince the Jewish people. However, not so the Egyptian people; they needed more convincing evidence than a snake.

In our parasha [7:9] Moshe and Aharon were told to perform the miracle of the staff before Par'oh as well. They did so, and the Torah states that the staff turned into a “*tannin*”, again translated by Rashi and Art scroll a “snake.” Since the Torah does not use synonyms I would like to suggest another meaning of *tannin*. A *tannin* can mean a snake, or it can mean an alligator, or, in some contexts it can refer to a whale.

One such occurrence is in the story of creation, where it says that HaShem created the big *tanninim* [Bereishit 1:21]. Rashi there picks up on a missing letter in התנינים and says that it is referring to the Leviatan, the symbol of destruction. The issue is that would it have reproduced, it would have destroyed the entire world, and therefore, HaShem took away the female [represented by the missing Yud], thereby ending its destructive capability. Thus, the forces of evil and destruction, which are called *tanninim* in the first part of Bereishit, find expression in our parasha.

Turning the staff into a snake and back was enough to convince Bnei Yisrael. For they internally did believe in HaShem and *wanted* to believe in G-d, but they just needed some gentle miracle to help them decide. To convince Par'oh of the same, much more convincing was needed, as he was not ready to admit any limitations to his power. Only a miracle of *tanninim*, followed by a long process of miracles, ending with the Makkat Bechorot, the dying of all first born was the stubborn leader left with no choice in the matter.

The lesson for us is to be cognizant of a brutal and destructive force that has traumatized the people of Paris just as it has done to the people of New York on September 11, 2001, and particularly, the Jews of the world. The terrorists targeted the people of France and the United States, but their real goal was to kill as many Jews as possible in the two countries. The leviathan is today the symbol of Islamic terrorism which will only be stopped by our *achdut*, our tefillot and finally by the actions of HaShem. Removing the female leviathan did not weaken the destructive power of the male but it did isolate it and limit its expansion. So too must the Jews and the world leaders isolate the terrorists politically, economically and militarily to prevent their expansion. The march of 3 million in Paris was a good beginning.