

The *Midrash Tanchuma* cites the verse in our *parashah* (12:29), "When Hashem, your G-d, will cut down the nations where you come, to drive them away before you, and you drive them away and settle in their land," and comments: Rabbi Levi said: To what may this be compared? To a king who planted a vineyard on his property which had great cedar trees. The king cut down the cedar trees but left the thorny undergrowth. His servants and household members asked him, "Our master the king! The thorns which grab onto and tear our clothes you left, but you chopped down the cedar trees?!" He answered, "If I had removed the thorns, with what would I have hedged my vineyard? Rather, I did the right thing, and when the vineyard is established, I will burn the thorns."

The *midrash* continues: The Jewish People are Hashem's vineyard, as we read (*Yeshayah* 5:7), "The vineyard of Hashem, Master of legions, is the House of Yisrael." When Hashem brought *Bnei Yisrael* into *Eretz Yisrael*, He "cut down the cedars," as it says (*Amos* 2:9), "I destroyed the Emorite before them, whose height was like the height of cedars." However, He left some descendants of the Canaanites in the Land to ensure that the Jewish People would keep the Torah, as it is written (*Shoftim* 3:1), "These are the nations that Hashem let remain, to test Yisrael through them." When the "vineyard" (*Bnei Yisrael*) becomes established in its observance of Torah, then (as we read in *Yeshayah* 33:12), "Nations will be like burning-sites for lime, like cut thorns set aflame."

What is the *midrash* teaching? R' Avraham Meir Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) explains: When we are mature enough as a nation to remain dedicated to Torah without having the nations remind us of our obligations, then we will be free of their persecution. Until then, the nations of the world will continue to prick us, like thorns surrounding a vineyard. (*Be'ur Ha'amarim*)

Tefilah

This year, we will iy"H devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified by the *Midrash Rabbah* and *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "*Nipul*" means falling before the King of Kings with complete submission, out of recognition that there is no one else to whom to turn. An analogy is how Queen Esther beseeched the King (*Esther* 8:3): "Esther spoke yet again to the King, *Va'tipol* / and she fell at his feet, and cried and begged him to avert the evil intention of Haman . . ."

R' Pincus continues: The existence of this type of prayer, characterized by feeling that there is no where else to turn, does not negate the obligation of *Hishtadlut* / making efforts to obtain one's needs through natural means. The mistake that people commonly make, however, is understanding *Hishtadlut* to mean: "I will do as much as I can, and I will rely on Hashem to fill in the gaps." The correct understanding is: G-d decreed *Hishtadlut* on mankind as a punishment for Adam's sin, but it actually contributes nothing to man's success. Rather, everything comes from Hashem!"

R' Pincus explains further: Among the laws of *Tzedakah* is that one may never turn a beggar away empty-handed. One may fulfill his obligation with a small coin, but one must give something if he is solicited directly. Another *Halachah* is that one is obligated in certain circumstances to provide all of a beggar's needs. However, if it is known that the beggar is going door-to-door and is relying on many sources, then no one person is obligated to provide all of his needs. - **Continued in box inside** -

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“This is what you shall not eat from among them: . . . the *Ra’ah*, the *Ayah* . . .” (14:13)

The *Gemara* (*Chullin* 63b) teaches: The *Ra’ah* and the *Ayah* are the same species of bird, whose real name is *Ayah*. Why, then, is it called “*Ra’ah*”? Because, when it is flying in Babylon, it can see (“*Ro’ah*”) the carcass of an animal in *Eretz Yisrael!*” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Moshe Yosef Rubin *z”l* (1892-1980; rabbi in Câmpulung, Romania, and later in Brooklyn, New York) asks: Why is such an amazing creature listed among the non-kosher birds?

He answers: The *Gemara* (*Zevachim* 113b) teaches that all those who died in the *Mabul* / Flood were washed into Bavel and are buried there. As such, writes R’ Rubin, Bavel is a place with plenty of carcasses of its own. If someone standing in Bavel nevertheless focuses on the “carcasses” in *Eretz Yisrael*, it is a sign that he is not “kosher.” This, writes R’ Rubin, is something we should reflect on before we are quick to speak ill of *Eretz Yisrael* and its inhabitants. Instead, in the words of *Tehilim* (128:5), “See the goodness of Yerushalayim, all the days of your life.” (*Pardes Yosef*)



“Then you shall take the awl and put it through his ear and the door, and he shall be an eternal slave to you; even to your maidservant shall you do the same.” (15:17)

R’ Aharon Lewin *z”l Hy”d* (the *Reisher Rav*; killed in the Holocaust) explains: When slavery was common, owners would brand their slaves as a sign of their ownership. Indeed, commentaries say that this is one of the reasons for the *Mitzvah* of *Brit Milah*--to create a physical reminder that *Hashem* is our Master. However, the Torah requires that an *Eved Ivri* / Jewish slave be treated with love and dignity; therefore, he may not be branded during his initial six years of servitude. But, if he says (verse 16), “I will not leave you, for he loves you and your household, for it is good for him with you,” then he has willingly forfeited his own dignity, and he is therefore branded. (*Ha’drash Ve’ha’iyun*)

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Similarly, R’ Pincus writes, *Hashem* never turns a “beggar” away empty-handed. However, if we pray with the attitude that *Hashem* is only one of several sources from which we can obtain our needs, then *Hashem* responds, as in the laws of *Tzedakah*: “In that case, I am not obligated to provide all your needs.” Only if one views *Hashem* as the only source for his needs is *Hashem* “obligated” to respond in kind.

(*She’arim B’tefilah* p.94)

“See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse.” (11:26)

R’ Ben Zion Rabinowitz *shlita* (*Biala Rebbe* in Yerushalayim and Tzefat; previously rabbi of Lugano, Switzerland) writes: At first glance, *Hashem* does not present before man both a blessing and a curse. Rather, as the verses that follow say, “The blessing, that you listen to the commandments of *Hashem* . . . And the curse, if you do not listen . . .” If so, asks the *Biala Rebbe*, why does our verse say, “I present before you today a blessing and a curse,” implying that they are placed before us at the same time?

He explains: The Torah is teaching here a fundamental principle in serving *Hashem*--i.e., that there is no *Middah* / character trait that is entirely bad. Rather, as we read in *Kohelet* (7:14), “*Elokim* has made the one as well as the other,” and each has its place.

The *Biala Rebbe* illustrates: To a large degree, what motivates us to improve ourselves is seeing other people’s accomplishments and being jealous of them. Thus, if not for the *Middah* of jealousy, few people would develop, grow, or change themselves. This, writes the *Biala Rebbe*, is a proper use of that mostly bad character trait.

Likewise, one of the very worst character traits is *Ga’avah* / haughtiness. Nevertheless, we read about the righteous King Yehoshafat (*Divrei Ha’yamim II* 17:6), “His heart was elevated in the ways of *Hashem*,” implying that there is a type of haughtiness that is praiseworthy. What is the difference between Yehoshafat’s positive trait and the *Ga’avah* that is considered a despicable trait? The *Biala Rebbe* explains: *Ga’avah* means raising oneself up by putting down other people or, at least, by considering oneself greater than other people. In contrast, being aware of one’s own potential and recognizing that he is special just because *Hashem* created him, without comparing oneself in any way to other people, is a praiseworthy trait. Indeed, it is a trait that obligates a person to “work,” for it forces a person to say: “Since *Hashem* created me, He must have done so for a reason; moreover, He must have imbued me with the all the tools I need to accomplish that mission. From this, I understand how much *Hashem* loves me and values me. I, however, have contributed nothing to my own greatness and have nothing to feel haughty about. To the contrary, if I am not fulfilling my mission, I should be ashamed of myself.”

(*Mevaser Tov: Va’yigbah Libo* p.5)

In our verse, “See” is in the singular form, but “you” is in the plural form. R’ Peretz Steinberg *shlita* (Queen, N.Y.) suggests that this alludes to the *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 40b) teaching that one should always view the world as half meritorious and half guilty, such that his or her next *Mitzvah* or sin will tip the scales for the entire world. (*Pri Etz Ha’chaim*)