

"You will flee with no one pursuing you." (26:17)

What is the curse implied in fleeing from non-existent pursuers ? On the contrary, it should be a blessing that no one is pursuing us! The *Gaon M'Vilna* explains this *pasuk* by first citing the *pasuk* in *Koheles 3:15*, "Hashem always seeks (to help) the (one who is) pursued." According to the *Midrash*, this applies even in the instance in which a *tzaddik* is chasing after a *rasha*; Hashem will protect the *rasha*, since he is the "underdog." This is the implication of the curse: No one will be chasing us, so that we will not be assisted by Hashem. Thus, even that small ray of hope that Hashem will come to our rescue despite our unworthiness will not materialize, since we are not really being pursued.

We suggest that a remarkable element of *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, is reflected in this punishment. The *Tochechah*, admonition, is a response to a seven-step progression of sinful behavior. Similarly, the curses are composed of seven steps of regression intensity. The chain is catalyzed by the first step, a lack of enthusiasm about *Torah* study. The seventh sin in the chain reaction reaches the nadir of blasphemy, denying the existence of Hashem Who has made the Covenant. Parallel to the sin of denying Hashem's existence is the curse of feeling one is being chased, although no one is in pursuit. It is fitting that one who feels that no one is above him should be chased by a phantom, causing him to feel insecure and paranoid wherever he goes.