

Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. (3:18)

The **Chidushei HaRim** cited by *Sifsei Tzadikim* explains that what seems as a curse is actually a blessing in disguise. Hashem had originally warned Adam, “On the day that you eat from the Tree of Knowledge, you will die.” Well, Adam ate and did not die. What happened? We must therefore surmise that the “curse,” “Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you,” which is a reference to *yissurim b’olam hazeh*, affliction/troubles in this world, is not really a substantive curse. The alternative to “thorns and thistles” is death. Not a bad trade-off.

The following episode supports this hypothesis, as well as providing us with a much-needed lesson on life. A man, a victim of abject poverty who had wealthy relatives in America, asked his friend to present to the *Chidushei HaRim* this question: His relatives were prepared to help him get back on his feet. May he accept their charity, or should he be concerned with the money’s source? The *Rebbe* replied in the negative. After a while, the poor man could no longer hold out. He needed the money badly. He could wait no longer. His relatives were his only option. The die was cast.

The man wrote his relatives soliciting their assistance. They immediately forwarded a considerable amount of money to him, but mail in those days was even worse than it is today. It took quite some time for the money to arrive in Poland. In the meantime, the poor man became ill. As his illness progressed, he asked his friend to speak with the *Chidushei HaRim* and obtain his blessing. The friend went to the *Rebbe* and petitioned for his blessing. The *Rebbe* replied, “At times, a decree of death is issued against a person. In its infinite mercy, the Heavenly Tribunal will provide an opportunity for ameliorating the death sentence against the individual by granting him *yissurim*, troubles, pain and misery, to offset the decree of death. What can I do? Your friend refused to accept the pain. The alternative is regrettably non-negotiable.” By the time the friend returned home, the poor man had passed on to his eternal rest.

This is a powerful lesson. We must know what to pray for. We must think long and hard before we ask for something. Who knows – maybe our present state, albeit not pleasant, is our salvation from something much worse.