Dvar Torah Outline — Tehillim 117 (Hallel): Why the Nations Praise Hashem, and the Three Middot of Nissim–Gevurot–Chasadim

Abstract

This dvar Torah focuses on the “strange” logic of Tehillim 117: why the non-Jewish nations are commanded to praise Hashem specifically because “His kindness overpowered *us*.” Using the Gemara in Pesachim and the Maharal’s framing, the shiur resolves the question by splitting the pasuk’s praises into different categories: the nations praise Hashem for His demonstrations of power in the world (nissim and gevurot), while Israel uniquely praises for chasadim done *to us*. Along the way, it develops a conceptual map connecting nissim to Shem Havayah/rachamim, gevurot to din, and chasadim to chesed, and it critiques an attempted reading that “נבראים” here means specifically Klal Yisrael.

I. The opening problem in Tehillim 117: the pasuk sounds “messed up”

A. The text and its internal tension

- **“הַלְלוּ אֶת־ה׳ כָּל־גּוֹיִם שַׁבְּחוּהוּ כָּל־הָאֻמִּים כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ וֶאֱמֶת־ה׳ לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּ־יָהּ”**
  (“Praise Hashem, all nations; laud Him, all peoples. For His kindness has prevailed over us, and the truth of Hashem is forever; praise Hashem.”)
- The intuitive question:
  - Why should **“כָּל־גּוֹיִם / כָּל־הָאֻמִּים”** praise Hashem **because** He was good to **“עָלֵינוּ”** (us, i.e., Israel)?
  - It feels disconnected: *their* praise seems motivated by *our* benefitting.

B. A second nuance: the phrase “גָּבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ”

- connotes ”גָּבַר“**strength/overpowering** (almost: His chesed “overpowered” us).
- The shiur flags this as a phrase that begs interpretation: why describe chesed in the language of gevurah?

II. Maharal's approach: "עָלֵינוּ" is not the hinge of the nations' praise

A. Re-reading the first half of the pasuk

- Maharal (as presented):
  - **"הַלְלוּ אֶת־ה׳ כָּל־גּוֹיִם"** — nations praise Hashem **"על הנסים שעשה הקדוש ברוך הוא עם הנברואים"** *(for the miracles He does with created beings)*.
  - **"שַׁבְּחוּהוּ כָּל־הָאֻמִּים"** — nations laud Hashem **"על הגבורות שעשה הקדוש ברוך הוא עם הנברואים"** *(for the acts of might He does with created beings)*.

B. Then "כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ" shifts focus to Israel

- The pasuk is effectively "split":
  - Nations: praise for Hashem's **nissim** and **gevurot** in the world.
  - Israel: **"וכל שכן אנו ישראל... כי גבר עלינו חסדו"** *(all the more so we, Israel… because His chesed has prevailed upon us)*.
- This resolves the initial disjunction:
  - The nations' obligation is **not** because of chesed to Israel.
  - The nations praise Hashem for what they can recognize of His **power**; Israel adds the dimension of **chesed done to us**.

III. The Gemara in Pesachim as the explicit source for the question-and-answer

A. The Gemara asks the exact question

- **"אומות מאי עבידתייהו דמשבחו?"**
  (What business do the nations have praising [Hashem]?)
- The question is driven by: **"כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ"**—why is that their reason?

B. The Gemara's resolution (as quoted)

- **"הַלְלוּ אֶת־ה׳ כָּל־גּוֹיִם... עַל נסים וגבורות דעביד להו"**
  (They praise Hashem for the miracles and mighty acts He performs.)
- **"וכל שכן אנו דבעינן לשבוחהו כי גבר עלינו חסדו"**
  (All the more so we must praise Him, for His chesed has prevailed upon us.)

IV. Three categories emerge: Nissim, Gevurot, Chasadim

A. The shiur’s organizing claim

- The Maharal/Gemara reading yields three “middot” being referenced:
  1. **נִסִּים** (miracles)
  2. **גְּבוּרוֹת** (mighty acts / din-like power)
  3. **חֲסָדִים** (kindnesses)

B. Addressing what is “missing” in the pasuk

- The shiur notes:
  - ”…הללו“ is not explicit in the words, but the Maharal supplies it as the meaning of ”נִסִּים“
  - is also not explicit as a word, but is inferred from ”גבורות“**”גְּבַר“**.

V. Mapping each category onto a divine “name”/ middah system

A. Why nissim are linked to the “Shem HaGadol”

- **”כי הנסים עושה בשמו הגדול כאשר ידוע“**
- Concept developed:
  - Miracles are not just “extra power,” but reveal Hashem as **above the system of nature**.
  - This is associated with **שם הויה (י-ה-ו-ה)** as the “essential name” behind all modalities.

B. Nissim as rachamim (relationship behind the system)

- The shiur explains:
  - **רחמים** means: even if the “system” would run a certain way, the Master of the system can **suspend** it due to relationship.
  - Therefore, miracles are rooted in that deeper level: “the face behind the mask.”

C. Gevurot and chasadim are more straightforward

- **”וגבורות נעשו במידת הדין“** — gevurot align with **din**.
- **”והחסדים נעשו במידת החסד“** — chasadim align with **chesed**.

VI. Why nations can praise for nissim/gevurot even if they're not the recipients

A. The Maharal's distinction: praising "ability" vs praising "benefit"

- Even if miracles were done specifically for Israel, nations can still praise because:
  - **Miracles "מורים על יכולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא"** *(indicate His capability)*.
  - One can praise Hashem's greatness upon *seeing* that such acts happen in the world.

B. Core claim: for nations, the recipient is irrelevant

- The shiur illustrates:
  - A non-Jew might read Tanach and be moved by the splitting of the sea, plagues, etc.
  - Their praise is: "Look what God can do," not "How kind God is to Jews."

C. But chasadim are different: they are personal/received

- **"אבל על החסדים יש לישראל לשבח, שעושה איתם חסדים"**
- Key distinction:
  - You praise a **chesed** in a fuller sense when you are the **recipient** of the chesed.
  - Therefore, Israel uniquely says: **"כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ"**.

VII. A side-controversy: does "נברואים" mean "Klal Yisrael" here?

A. The note attributed to Rav Hartman (as reported)

- An attempt was made to interpret "נברואים" as referring specifically to **ישראל**.

B. The shiur's rejection

- The speaker argues:
  - There is no strong precedent for the Maharal calling Israel "נבראים" in that way.
  - The later lines make it clear the nations are praising Hashem for **nissim/gevurot**, even though those are performed for Israel—because it showcases divine ability in the world.
- Proposed resolution without redefining "נברואים":
  - can mean "נברואים"**human beings generally**; the miracles happened to involve Jews, but the nations' praise is about Hashem's power with "created beings."

VIII. Limits of miracles for the nations (hashgachah and “systems”)

A. A framework raised in discussion

- The shiur references the idea (associated with classic hashgachah frameworks) that:
  - Open miracles and individualized providence are uniquely bound up with **Klal Yisrael**.
  - Other nations run more through “natural” channels / delegated systems (e.g., each nation has a sar/malach).

B. A qualification

- Even if a non-Jew experiences unusual salvation, it can be framed as:
  - happening **for the sake of Israel** (benefiting a Jew or the Jewish mission).

IX. In Summary

- Tehillim 117’s apparent contradiction is resolved by the Gemara/Maharal: the nations praise Hashem for **nissim and gevurot**, while Israel adds praise for **chasadim**.
- The phrase **“כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ”** becomes a uniquely Jewish reason to praise—chesed is experiential and relational.
- The shiur maps the categories onto a middot system: **nissim** → **שם הויה/רחמים**, **gevurot** → **דין**, **chasadim** → **חסד**.
- need not be read as “Israel”; nations can praise Hashem’s power as revealed in history ”נברואים“ even when Israel is the beneficiary.