

## Appreciating the Benefits of *Yissurim* (Difficulties and Challenges) – Part 1

Every Shabbat we request from G-d in our *davening* (prayers):

*Sab'einu mituvecha v'samcheinu bishuatecha* — Satisfy us from Your goodness, and give us *simcha* (joy or happiness) with Your salvation.

These words seem quite puzzling. If something is from G-d's **own** good, then why do we need to ask G-d to “satisfy” us? Won't that happen automatically? And if what occurs to us is truly G-d's salvation, then why do we need to ask G-d to ensure that it will “give us *simcha*?” What is it that we are really asking for in these prayers?

When it comes to *yissurim* (difficulties and challenges), this awareness is neither simple nor obvious. Even that which is both the ultimate good and salvation from G-d Himself can sometimes be extremely hard for us to see and appreciate. Perhaps this is what we are asking G-d to help us with. That would explain why these prayers come right after our request to G-d of “*v'tein chelkeinu b'Toratecha* — Grant us a portion in your Torah.” The understanding which we derive from the Torah, will help us enormously to be able to feel satisfaction and *simcha* from even our most painful challenges.

When people think about *yissurim*, which is usually, and badly, translated as “suffering,” their most ambitious goal is often to simply try to cope with them and endure them. Even those who have learned and grown significantly from their *yissurim* rarely speak about *yissurim* in positive terms. In fact, the very process of focusing on and trying to appreciate benefits within *yissurim*, may cause others to become upset with us for our presumed insensitivity. However, when one looks at the multitude of Torah sources that speak about *yissurim*, and really takes these sources seriously, one gets a very different message. G-d willing, that extremely positive message will help us to view *yissurim*, as well as life in general, with the proper Torah perspective.

### Classical Jewish sources have always viewed *yissurim* as the ultimate expression of G-d's love for us

The clearest verse that teaches that *yissurim* should be seen in positive, not negative, terms is ***Devarim* (8:5)**:

*V'yadata im levavecha, ki ka'asher y'yaseir ish et b'no, Hashem Elokecha m' yasreka* — And you should know with your heart, that just like a parent gives *yissurim* to his child, G-d your L-rd gives you *yissurim*.

No one would translate this verse as — “Just like a parent gives suffering to his child, G-d your L-rd gives you suffering.” The comparison of G-d to a parent teaches us that *yissurim* are **always** given from love, and exclusively for our benefit.

This positive view of *yissurim* is similarly clear in ***Tehilim* (94:12)**:

*Ashrei hagever asher t' yasrenu Hashem, u'm'Toratecha t'lamdenu* — **Fortunate** is the one that gets *yissurim* from G-d, and whom You teach from Your Torah.

The ***Orchot Tzadikim* (Sha'ar Simcha)** wrote:

The Sages say — “***Chavivim Yissurim*** — *Yissurim* are precious” (*Baba Metzia* 85a). One should accustom his mouth to say — “*Gam zu l'tova* — Also this is for the good” (*Ta'anit* 21a), and “*Kol*

*mai d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid* — All that the Merciful One does is for the good” (*Brachot* 60b) since there are many *ra'ot* (negatives) that in the end will be [seen as] *tovot* (positives).

The *Gemara Nidah* (31a) thus explained the verse — “I thank you Hashem for having been angry with me, Your anger turned away and [then] You consoled me” (*Yeshayahu* 12:1) with an analogy of two men who were about to travel on a boat. A thorn embedded itself in the foot of the first and he could not travel. He cursed his bad luck as the second one managed to go on the ship. Some time later he heard that the ship had sunk and all aboard had been lost. He then began to praise the Blessed Creator, since he **saw** that he had been kept alive through this mishap. One should, [therefore, always] have *simcha* in *yissurim*, and in any other losses which occur to him, since **one never knows** what future benefit will come to him from them. This was the attitude of Nachum Ish Gamzu (*Ta'anit* 21a).

The **Ramchal** added in *Da'at Tevunot* (54):

G-d's ways will become known **in the future** to the eyes of all of Yisrael — how even the rebukes and *yissurim* were given only for good, and prepared exclusively for blessing, since G-d desires only to rectify His creation.

A simple way to appreciate *yissurim* is to realize just how limited our present-day perspective can be. People often look back on something which, at the time, they considered to be the “worst possible thing” they could imagine happening. And then, in hindsight, they realize that what occurred was not nearly as bad as they had initially thought. There are even cases where they then see what happened to have been extremely helpful for their life.

A dramatic example of this involved someone who had battled cancer successfully for a number of years. After this excruciating process had ended and he was finally healthy, he told a friend that he wouldn't wish the pain and trauma which he had endured on his worst enemy. But, at the same time, now that he had actually gone through it, he wouldn't give up the growth and lessons he had gained from this ordeal for all of the money in the world.

### ***Yissurim* teach and guide us all throughout our lives**

Three sources in ***Mishlei*** spell out this critical function of *yissurim* to teach and guide us:

“*Mussar Hashem b'ni al timas, v'al takotz b'tochachto. Ki et asher ye'ehav Hashem yochiach, u'ch'av et ben yirtze* — Don't disparage the *mussar* (moral guidance) from G-d, my son, and don't reject His *tochacha* (chastisement or rebuke), because He chastises [only] the one He loves, and is reconciled [to him] like a father to his son” (3:11–12).

“*Derech chaim tochachat mussar* — The path of life is corrective rebuke” (6:23).

And the most well-known of all — “*Choseich shivto sonei b'no, v'ohavo shicharo mussar.*” This is commonly and incorrectly translated as — “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” It **actually** means — “One who spares his rod — **hates** his child, but he who **loves** him — disciplines him in his youth” (13:24).

The ***Medrash*** (*Shemot Rabba* 1:1) explained this verse:

“One who spares his rod — **hates** his child, but he who **loves** him — disciplines him in his youth” — All who withhold discipline from their child, their [child] will eventually go out to bad behavior, and the parent will [end up] hating him. We find this with Yishmael...Eisav...Avshalom...[and] Adonia.

[The continuation of the verse] — “but he who loves him disciplines him in his youth” — refers to Hashem, Who loves the Jews and [therefore] **increases** *yissurim* for them... [And] whoever gives *yissurim* to his child increases the love of his child to him [the parent]; his child will then honor him... We find this with Yitzchak...Yaakov...and all twelve of the sons of Yaakov.

**Medrash Rabba** (*Bereshit* 9:8) added:

[If the verse about the creation of the world would have said] — “Behold it is **very** good” [I would have said that it is referring to] — *middat hatov* (the quality of good). [Now that it is actually written —] “**And** behold it is very good” — [this refers to] *middat* (the quality of) *yissurim*... [The *Medrash* then asks —] Which is the path that brings a person to life in *Olam Haba*? The quality of *yissurim*.

And one more **medrash** (*Eichah Rabba* 4:25) says very simply that:

*Yissurim* were created [specifically] to escort us to our intended destination.

The **Zohar** (*Bechukotai* 42) wrote:

How beloved is *Yisrael* before G-d! G-d wants to correct them and lead them in the straight path, like a parent who has mercy on his child. And from this love towards him, you find that His rod is constantly in His hand to lead him in the straight path...

As it says (*Mishlei* 3:12) — “for G-d chastises the one that He loves.” And whoever G-d doesn't love and [actually] hates, He removes *tochacha* from him [and] removes the rod from him.

The **Ramchal** (in *Da'at Tevunot* 154) asked:

How does this *mussar* (corrective discipline) originate from love? No parent who loves his child wants him to be filled with bad *middot* (character traits), but rather, because of his love, wants to straighten his path...[therefore,] from the source of the love itself flows all of the traits of *mussar*, that is — the kindness, the judgment, and the mercy all blended together...but never [G-d forbid] from cruelty or anger.

**Rav Hirsch** explained the verse:

“And you should know with your heart that just like a parent gives *yissurim* to his child, G-d your L-rd gives you *yissurim*” (*Devarim* 8:5).

The meaning of the root of *yissurim* is evident from [various] sources...[including] the noun “*mussar*.” All these are sufficient proof that the root...does not denote strictly chastisement as punishment... The basic meaning is to teach someone a lesson, shape their character, and inculcate values... Our moral perfection to be attained through instruction and practice, is a matter of close concern to G-d. His Providence therefore shapes our destinies in accordance with the requirements of our moral training and instructs us through personal experience, training our moral strength through constant practice... G-d relates to us, through His Providence, like a father, and all that He sends to us, whether joy or sorrow, is meant for our betterment and moral refinement.

The **S'fat Emet** (*Devarim* — *Re'eh*) added that G-d told the Jewish people:

I didn't place the blessings and curses in front of you to hurt you, but rather to show you the good path, because the *yissurim* are themselves Torah and teachings for the Jewish people... a person should [therefore] find Torah and lessons [even] in the midst of their *yissurim*.

And finally, the **Torat Avraham** (*Nevuah v'Yissurim* — *aleph*) explained that just like the function of the ancient *Nevi'im* (Prophets) was to help us to clarify reality, *yissurim* and *mussar* from G-d are our "modern-day" prophets to similarly help us to clarify reality today. He, therefore, wrote:

*Yissurim* are not merely a punishment for *aveirot* (transgressions) that we have already done, but rather G-d's agents to help us to avoid any additional *aveirot* in the future... While the *Nevi'im* were unable to get the Jews to do *teshuva* (return back to G-d), the *yissurim* were successful in getting the Jews to do *teshuva*...

[The *Torat Avraham* (*Nevuah v'Yissurim* — *beis, gimmel*) continued:]

This which is able to reveal the transgressions of both the individual and the community is an incredible level of *chesed* (kindness)...since there is no solution for one who is lacking awareness other than to force him to be aware... Can we imagine any greater level of *chesed* following a *chet* (transgression) than this?... The majority of *aveirot* that people transgress are some form of mistake — generally in terms of either the *halacha* (Jewish law) or the reality. People are, therefore, in great need of *yissurim* to clarify and reveal those matters which are hidden in their hearts... Since *yissurim* force us to introspect about the underlying causes of our *aveirot*, they are much more likely to lead to a true *teshuva m'ahavah* (return to G-d from love).

### ***Yissurim* provide a tremendous *kaparah* (spiritual repair and rectification) to fix up the damage that we caused to ourselves with our transgressions**

Imagine that we had the ability to eliminate any single aspect from the current world situation. What would we choose to get rid of? The obvious first choice for many people would probably be *yissurim* (painful difficulties). It, therefore, comes as a big shock to many that Yitzchak Avinu (our forefather) actually **demand**ed that there be *yissurim*:

He, thereby, inaugurated the concept of *yissurim* in the world... He said to G-d, "[If] a man dies without *yissurim* [to cleanse him of his transgressions] — the trait of Justice will completely block him [in the Heavenly court]. But once You bring *yissurim* upon him — the trait of Justice will no longer block him." G-d answered him, "By your life, you requested a good thing, and I will begin with you." From the beginning of *Bereshit* until here, no *yissurim* are written... [But now,] G-d gave him *yissurim* [as it says in *Bereshit* 27:1] — "And it was, when Yitzchak had become old, that his eyes dimmed from seeing." (***Medrash Rabba* — *Toldot* 9:9**)

**Rav Simcha Zissel** (*Chachmah u'Mussar, aleph* — 293) pointed out that:

This demand from Yitzchak Avinu for *yissurim* is a great comfort for those dealing with *yissurim*, because Yitzchak was [like] a perfect offering and one of the Patriarchs, and [even] he was afraid of the trait of judgment, and G-d [actually] agreed with him. Therefore, every person needs to see the justice in the judgment from Heaven, and to accept [their] *yissurim* with love.

The ***Tanna D'vei Eliyahu*** (*Seder Eliyahu Rabba* 18) stressed that:

When *yissurim* come upon [a person], they are coming upon him for his benefit, in order to save him from everything that he did. He should not say in his heart, "I am a *tzadik* (righteous person), I am straight, I am very giving — should *yissurim* come upon me?" When he gets *yissurim*, he gets them only in truth, as it says, "And you should know with your heart, that just like a parent

gives *yissurim* to his child, G-d your L-rd gives you *yissurim*.” And is there a person in the world that wants to hurt his child, G-d forbid?

**Rebbe Akiva** in the ***Mechilta*** (*Yitro b'Chodesh* 10) contrasted the Jewish attitude toward *yissurim* with that of the rest of the world:

When good comes upon them [the non-Jewish nations], they give honor to their gods...[but] when difficulties come upon them, they curse their gods... However, when G-d brings good upon [*Yisrael*], they give praise, and when He brings *yissurim* upon them, they [also] give praise... And furthermore, *Yisrael* appreciates the *yissurim* more than the good, because a person surrounded by good all of his days would have no forgiveness for his transgressions. And what gives him forgiveness for his transgressions? *Yissurim*...[as it says (*Mishlei* 3:11–12)] — “Don't disparage the *mussar* from G-d...and don't reject His *tochacha*, because He chastises [only] the one that He loves.”

The ***Tanya*** (*Igeret HaTeshuva* — Chap. 12) wrote:

The reason for *simcha* with *yissurim* of the body, is that it is a great and powerful benefit for the soul that transgressed to become clean in *Olam Ha'zeh* (this present world), and to be saved from the cleansing of *Gehenom* (the purification after death). As the Ramban wrote in his introduction to *Sefer Iyov* (the book of Job) — “**even the *yissurim* of Iyov for seventy years [would be worthwhile for us if they would be able to save us from] the *yissurim* of the soul for [even] one single moment in *Gehenom*.** Since this world is built on *chessed* (kindness), [even] mild *yissurim* in *Olam Ha'zeh* can save one from harsh judgments in *Olam Haba* (the world to come).”

**Rav Simcha Zissel** (*Chachmah u'Mussar, Aleph* — 249) added [based on these words of the Ramban]:

[Realize] how much *simcha* a person should have from his *yissurim*. But [at least] see to it that one doesn't, G-d forbid, [ignore them] and fail to take *mussar* from them, to return from one's bad ways.

Based on the ***Gemara Chulin*** (7b) which stated that — “No person stubs his toe below unless it was decreed upon him from Above,” the ***Chafetz Chaim*** (*Sheim Olam* — Chap. 3) pointed out that these principles also apply with *yissurim* that come to us through the actions of other people:

Every aspect of pain that one encounters, including from other people, is all from Heaven because of one's transgressions... And G-d does all of this for the benefit of man, in order to cleanse his transgressions through his shame. And when one carefully considers this, rather than thinking about how to get back at the one who hurt him, one should give thanks to G-d for arranging this matter for him to atone for his transgressions... When one understands very well what a great benefit occurred through this person, it will then be easy not to take revenge or bear a grudge because of this. For example, one would not be angry at one who scrubbed dirt off of him with hot water, even though, at the time of the cleansing, the heat was very painful for him.

The ***Chafetz Chaim*** (*Sheim Olam* – Chap. 3) continued:

“In general, a person should not complain at all about *yissurim*, as we see in the *Medrash* that Yitzchak Avinu, who recognized just how frightening the strict judgment would be in the future [world], **demand**ed *yissurim*...”

I heard in the name of the *Vilna Gaon*, that if not for *yissurim*, we would not be able to exist in that [future] world.

[The *Chafetz Chaim* then asked us to imagine the following scenario:]

A person passes away and his *neshama* (soul) ascends upward. He is shown a type of balance scale that weighs out his actions, to see if his positive overpowers his negative, or the opposite, G-d forbid. He listens as a Heavenly voice calls out and announces that all of the merits he has done his entire life have been gathered...

Immediately, all of the advocates that were created from his *mitzvot* are gathered and stand to the right side of the balance scale. Afterwards, another Heavenly voice announces that all of his transgressions have also been gathered. Behold these multitudes are gathered, dressed and wrapped in black. They become so numerous that the negative side is pulled downwards from their weight... When the person then sees this, he protests loudly and thinks to himself, "What will be my end? I will certainly be considered a *rasha* (evil person)!" In the midst of this, [another] Heavenly voice goes out and asks, "Where are the *yissurim* that he had while he was still in *Olam Ha'zeh*?"

Immediately, all of the *yissurim* that he had during his entire life are gathered, and they all run to the right side [where his *mitzvot* are] and that side is pulled down greatly. [This is because] through the *yissurim* he gains a huge *kaparah* (spiritual cleansing) for many of his transgressions, and [thereby] retains the status of a *tzadik*. He [would therefore] have [a great] *simcha* and give thanks to G-d for **every** [single one of the *yissurim*] that had come upon him!

And finally, the **Rabeinu Bachaya** (*Kad HaKemach* — *Kipurim* 1) reassured us that:

G-d gives strength to *tzadikim*, and reinforces their strength with the ability to withstand *yissurim*, since the *yissurim* are the atonement for their transgressions.

***Yissurim* serve as a *nisayon* (test or challenge) to help us actualize our potential**

***Bereshit Rabba* 32:3** (from *Mishnat Chachamim*):

The craftsman...doesn't test the weak barrels. Why? Because once he hits them they break. And which ones does he test? The good barrels — because even if he hits them many times, they don't break. Similarly, G-d doesn't test the *reshayim* (evil people) [so much]. And who does G-d [particularly] test? The *tzadikim* whom He loves.

***Shemot Rabba* 31:3:**

There is no person that G-d doesn't test [at all]. The wealthy one is tested [to see] if his hand will be open and he will give *tzedaka* (charity)...and He tests the poor person [to see whether] he will accept his *yissurim* with love and not rebel or be angry.

The ***Gemara Menachot*** (53b) asked:

Why is *Yisrael* (the Jewish nation) compared to an olive? To tell you that just like an olive gives forth its oil only through being squeezed, similarly *Yisrael* doesn't return to the good except through *yissurim*.

The ***Chafetz Chaim*** (*Sheim Olam* — Chap. 3) explained:

One should not be bothered that, since there is *hashgacha* (Divine Supervision) in the world — how can this person be poor and this person wealthy?... Even our difficulties are not for nothing... The Sages teach us that there is no person who doesn't have to deal with tests... [Since our awareness and perspective is so narrow and limited] we [simply] need to walk with G-d wholeheartedly, and to have *emunah* (complete belief) that all that G-d does is entirely for the good.

**Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — 1:23) wrote:

Every person is surrounded by what is required for their particular situation... There are those who need to stand up to the *nisayon* (test) of wealth and pleasures in *Olam Ha'zeh* — not to become overly involved in physicality to the point that they forget their Creator entirely... And there are [others] who need to withstand the *nisayon* of poverty and many difficulties, and even so, not to question how G-d deals with them.

While we are in this world we can't know, but it is very possible that if we could ask a *neshama* before it would descend to here — which portion it would choose — whether to pass through the passageway [of *Olam Ha'zeh*] with wealth and comfort or [to choose] the path of poverty and difficulty, it is very easy to understand that it would choose the path of difficulties, because whoever's heart is broken is much closer to contemplating what his purpose is with his soul.

**Yissurim bring us closer to G-d in *Olam Ha'zeh* — “No atheists in foxholes”**

**Medrash Tanchuma** (*Ki Teitzei* 2):

A person needs to give appreciation to G-d when *yissurim* come upon him. Why? Because *yissurim* draw a person to G-d, as it says — “for G-d chastises the one that He loves.”

The **Medrash Tanchuma** (*Nitzavim* 1) also asked:

Why are the non-Jewish nations liable to destruction, and we (the Jewish people) are still existing? Because when *yissurim* come upon them, they rebel in them and don't mention the name of G-d... But when *yissurim* come upon *Yisrael*, they are humbled and *daven* (pray)... Therefore, G-d says to them, “Although these curses come upon you, they are what establishes you, as it says (*Devarim* 8:16), ‘In order to afflict you and in order to test you, to do you good in the end.’”

The **Sifri** (*Mishnat Chachamim*, pg. 511) wrote:

*Chavivin yissurin* (*yissurim* are precious) — because just like offerings cause acceptance by G-d, so too do *yissurim*...and furthermore, *yissurim* cause more acceptance than the offerings, since the offerings are [merely] with one's money, while *yissurim* are with one's body. (*V'etchanan* 32).

Everything which is closer and more internal to a person is more pleasing. Therefore, an offering which is similar to one's money is external, as opposed to *yissurim* which are themselves the body of the person.

**Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — 1:21) explained that:

We need to know that *yissurim* are Heavenly assistance (*siyata d'Shimaya*) which G-d uses to help us to come close to Him without removing the possibility of choice from us. Although the *yissurim* are perfectly appropriate for us, to teach us, the lesson itself still depends on our choice.

We are capable of closing our eyes and stiffening our necks, and [using it] for the opposite — to complain against G-d.

The **Shiurei Da'at** (Rav Elya Meir Bloch, *Rosh HaYeshiva of Telshe* — pg. 126–127 — *Yissurim shel ahavah*) explained that:

While we know how difficult it is to serve G-d in the midst of pain and difficulties, and we *daven* (pray) that Hashem should save us [from them], at the same time we recognize how much benefit there is in them, and just how valuable they are — to acquire spiritual elevations that are impossible to attain at times of peace and tranquility... This is the advantage that people have over the *melachim* (angels) — that two opposing feelings are able to exist within one's heart at the same time... A person has the ability to feel pain to the point of crying and wailing, and even so, to have *simcha* with a full heart.

We find this with Avraham Avinu who was eager to carry out the command of his Creator to offer up his only son and to do the will of G-d with a full heart. At the same time, the Sages teach us that he was standing up to his knees in his tears. In truth, G-d has no desire for a person to kill his feelings. Rather, through his regular feelings, he should increase the required feelings in order to properly bring out from within himself the *mitzvot* of his Creator... While the Sages tell us that *melachim* have only a single heart [i.e., one emotional state at a time], man has two hearts [i.e., the ability to have even contradictory emotions simultaneously].

## **Appreciating the Benefits of Yissurim (Difficulties & Challenges) – Part 2**

***Yissurim* weaken our attachment to physicality, to purify us in preparation for *Olam Haba***

The **Gemara Brachot** (5a) discussed a sequence of three ways to understand and relate to *Yissurim*:

First, one should examine his deeds; Second, he should attribute them to *bitul Torah* (wasting time from learning Torah); and if neither of these make sense as the cause of these *yissurim*, then one should view them as *yissurim shel ahavah* (difficulties from love). Rashi explained [regarding *yissurim shel ahavah*] that — “G-d afflicts those whom He loves, even if they have not committed any *chet*, in order to give them greater benefit in *Olam Haba* than their merits would otherwise have justified.”

The **Maharal** (*Netiv HaYissurin* — *aleph*) explained this *Gemara*:

When a person transgresses, and [necessarily becomes] deficient [i.e., the first possibility that the *Gemara* spoke about], it is appropriate that *yissurim* should come upon him...

If one is lax with learning Torah [i.e., the second possibility], then even though he isn't inherently lacking, he is still considered deficient because...he is lacking the perfection which it was possible for him to have gotten from the Torah, and [therefore] *yissurim* will come upon him.

[The final possibility of the *Gemara*] is to assume that they are *yissurim shel ahavah*. The explanation is — When a person is a *tzadik*, and fitting for the most exalted level, but in terms of his body and connection to the physical, there is an aspect that is not fit for that level, G-d brings *yissurim* upon him in order to cleanse the *nefesh* (soul) until he becomes purified... Since G-d loved him and wanted to bring this person closer to be able to cling to Him, and he was the one preventing and blocking this because he was not fit for this close connection, they were, therefore, called *yissurim shel ahavah* — it was because of G-d's love that He brought them upon



this person... Therefore, they should [also] be accepted from love, otherwise there will be no connection (*d'veikut*) in them...

The Maharal then quoted the continuation of this *Gemara*:

"When Rebbe Yochanan was ill, Rebbe Chanina went to him and asked him — '*Chavivin alecha yissurin* (Are these *yissurim* precious to you)?' and he answered him — 'Neither them nor their benefit!' which sounds like he felt that these *yissurin* were [really] not valuable!"

The Maharal explained:

This is not a difficulty (*kashe*), since a *tzadik* may certainly worry that he will not be able to stand up to the *yissurim*, and will [end up] doing what *Iyov* did [i.e., cursing and blaspheming G-d]... And it is very clear that they will only be *chavivim* when one can bear them, since they will then purify the soul, until they bring the person to cling to G-d.

The **Maharal** (*Netiv Hayissurin* — *gimmel*) explained further:

*Yissurim* are more precious than all other levels...since they cleanse, purify, and elevate the soul, until it becomes removed from the physical...and the one with *yissurim* becomes separate from the material until he becomes a *ben Olam Haba* (one fit for the world to come)...

When *yissurim* come upon *Yisrael*, they are humbled and they cry out to G-d... As long as the *yissurim* continue to come on them, their [physical] deficiency that distances them from G-d is removed until they become close to G-d. When the physical body is [minimized], they cling to G-d, and therefore they call out to G-d in their time of distress... And as long as *yissurim* continue to come on them, they acquire more of a connection (*d'veikut*) to G-d.

The **Zohar** focused very strongly on this purifying quality of *yissurim*:

Come and see, at the moment that G-d desires to enlighten the *neschama* (soul) of a person, he strikes the body in order to empower the *neschama*, because as long as the *neschama* and the body are equal, the *neschama* is not able to be in control. And when the body is broken, the *neschama* is in control. (*Toldot* 90).

A person needs a weak body and a strong soul to overpower it, and then G-d will love him... G-d [therefore] gives difficulties to the *tzadik* in *Olam Ha'zeh* to give him merit in *Olam Haba*. (*Vayeishev* 27).

Rebbe Elazar said — All that G-d does is with judgment (*din*), and if he brings *yissurim* on a *tzadik*, [it is] in order to purify his soul to bring him to *Olam Haba*...and to remove from him the physical impurities (*zuhama*) that he received in *Olam Ha'zeh*. Therefore, the body is broken and the soul is purified. (*Vayeishev* 36).

These are called *yissurim shel ahavah*, because they are [from] love, and not because of the person himself (*Vayeishev* 41).

The **Ramban** explains that *yissurim shel ahavah* help the *tzadik* to fix some small flaw, and are motivated by love, not judgment.

The **Torat Avraham** (*Shleimut v'Yissurim* — *dalet*) wrote:

One of the most powerful means for controlling physicality, which is the source of all bad *middot* (character traits), is *yissurim*. *Yissurim* intrinsically weaken our desires, and gradually separate us from our attachment to all physical matters. We see that it is possible to live without desires, comforts, petty arrogance, and illusory honor. Bit by bit, we free ourselves from our soul being enslaved and our limited perspectives until we are finally able to see our true essence.

Just as an excess of physical matters influences us to increase our arrogance and to forget our Creator, similarly will a limitation in these matters enhance our humility and our connection to our Creator.

In this manner, **even *yissurim* without *teshuva*** can bring us to *shleimut* (completion) — first of *middot*, and then of both *deyot* (character traits) and *hashkafot* (perspectives). This is because *middot* are the root of our character.

However, while *yissurim* with *teshuva* can achieve *shleimut* quickly and directly; without *teshuva* and contemplation, it is a slow and difficult process.

**Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — 4:240–246) explained:

Once a person has transcended and nullified his physicality to the point that it no longer has any hold over him...he is then able to receive the light from the upper realms of wisdom.

In order for a person to be able to grasp the hidden exalted wisdom through *yissurim* requires three conditions:

One must have *emunah* that the ***hashgacha pratit*** (Divine supervision) from Hashem covers **every** single aspect of his life... as the Sages teach — “No person [even] stubs his toe below unless it was decreed upon him from above” — *Chulin* 7b.

It is clear to him that the judgments of G-d are absolutely **true** in every single detail...

One grasps that — “*Kol mai d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid* — All that the Merciful One does is for the good.” In other words, one must believe in his heart that everything G-d does for him is absolutely good, and its purpose and intention is exclusively for the benefit of man, even if he doesn't always grasp what this hidden good is...

The deepest secret of *yissurim* is that the *yissurim* we need to deal with are exclusively in this illusory world, and only for those who relate to these illusions [as real]... While this is [the situation] with the enormous *yissurim* for the greatest *tzadikim*, we can also fulfill this on our own lower level...

Every aspect of freeing ourselves from under the yoke of the body and its leanings, will uncover the light of the redemption. One sees something that was very difficult for him yesterday, and [really] bothered him yesterday, which is [now] merely an illusion. With this, he redeems himself with a spiritual redemption. This is the path of elevation from level to level — to see and to discern that what previously, on his lower level, appeared to be insurmountable, is [now] only an illusion, and to cling to a life of spirituality where he really lives the truth and is fully alive.

**Is our primary frame of reference — *Olam Ha'zeh* or *Olam Haba*?**

***Pirkei Avot*** (4:21) stated:

*Ha'olam Ha'zeh* is like a passageway leading towards *Ha'olam Haba*; prepare yourself in the passageway in order to be able to enter the palace.

Understanding that the fundamental purpose of *Olam Ha'zeh* is to prepare us for *Olam Haba* will shift our focus away from *Olam Ha'zeh*, and thereby help us to deal much more effectively with whatever *yissurim* we have in our lives.

**Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* 1:19–20) expressed this critical focus on the reality of *Olam Haba* very beautifully:

Every believer knows that [it is] through our good deeds in *Olam Ha'zeh* that we will merit life in *Olam Haba*, which is the main life and the eternal life. However, there are those who think that life in *Olam Ha'zeh* is also a life...

Therefore, we come to all of these great and difficult questions — Why does this person merit a wonderful life while this other lives a life of difficulty? Why does this *tzadik* need to endure many *yissurim* and a life of *Gehenom* (pain and difficulty), while all of the days of this *rasha* are like a holiday?

There are those with a complete *emunah* who don't have these questions. Since the Judge [of the world] is G-d, and we are simply human beings, how can we think that with our limited intelligence we would be able to understand the depth of the justice of G-d? However, there are also many who don't [find] this clear answer to be sufficient. Their hearts are questioning G-d's traits — since He is good and compassionate, why is our life so bitter? And if He is punishing us, why is the punishment so great for the *tzadik*, while nothing [seems to] happen to the evil ones? There is a great danger that through the enormous [difficulties] people have to bear, they will come to complain about the justice of G-d...

There are people that this question bothers greatly in their [ability to] serve G-d from their hearts; [in fact] these complaints come out from the depths of their hearts, and they think — “What will we gain by serving [G-d]?”

However, all of this comes to us because we see *Olam Ha'zeh* through the perspective that we mentioned [that it has an independently significant existence]. However, for those who aspire to be able to see the world from the perspective which the Sages taught us, then these questions automatically disappear.

**Pirkei Avot** (4:21) taught us — “*Olam Ha'zeh* is compared to a passageway and *Olam Haba* to the palace.” Every action that a person does is to attain whatever purpose he is aspiring to. When we see something as a great achievement, we are willing to work for it, even if it is very difficult...

The purpose of the entire creation, and necessarily the purpose of all of *Olam Ha'zeh*, is *Olam Haba*. And even if our path through this passageway is very difficult, and filled with obstacles and stumbling blocks, it is fitting for a person to go through it with a positive outlook, since there is no other way in front of him to reach his destination...

On a deeper level, every aspect of the substance of *Olam Ha'zeh* is exclusively as a passageway for *Olam Haba*; it is not an independent world. One who builds for himself a passageway without a palace [as its destination], didn't build anything, since it is [then] not even a passageway. This is exactly the situation with all of *Olam Ha'zeh*, and all that happens to us in it. All of it is only what is necessary for us to enter into *Olam Haba*.”

The **Gemara Kiddushin** (40b), therefore, told us very simply that:

G-d brings *yissurim* upon *tzadikim* in *Olam Ha'zeh* in order [to help them] to inherit *Olam Haba*.

The Medrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 30:2 — *Mishnat Chachamim*) explained:

**David HaMelech** asked G-d (*Tehilim* 16:11) — “Show me the path of life” — Which path leads straight to life in *Olam Haba*? G-d answered him — “If life in *Olam Haba* is what you need, then you **need** *yissurim*.”

And on the flip side, the **Orchot Tzadikim** (*Sha'ar Simcha*) warned us that:

Whoever worries [and focuses excessively] about *Olam Ha'zeh* will have no *menucha* (tranquility) his entire life.

**Rav Yeruchem Levovitz** (*Ohr Yechezkel* — *Michtavim*, pg. 184) pointed out that:

When G-d sends *yissurim*, many people become depressed and full of anxiety. **Our attitude [toward *yissurim*] is the litmus test to know just how strong our *emunah* [and internalized belief] is in *Olam Haba*...**and only one who really acknowledges *Olam Haba* is considered [fully] part of the Jewish people.

**Rav Simcha Zissel** (*Darkei Mussar*, pg. 58, quoted in Gateway to Happiness, pg. 253–4) expressed this with a simple *mashal* (analogy):

When one travels to the wedding of a close friend, he is happy the entire trip. Though the ride might not be comfortable and the food may be a bit stale, he still feels *simcha* because his mind is focused on the goal of the trip, where he will greatly enjoy himself.

Similarly, when a person focuses on the goals of his life, he is able to overcome the difficulties involved. When one's focus is on *Olam Haba*, he lives in a state of happiness even though he experiences many difficulties along his relatively short trip.

### Three concluding essays:

**The Torat Avraham (Simcha b'Yissurim) wrote:**

The truth is that one who understands the goal of *yissurim* and strives to reach it, won't desire to **eliminate** *yissurim*, but rather to **fulfill** them, to thereby hear their message and to achieve a true *shleimut*. The verse (*Tehillim* 94:12) declares — “*Ashrei hagever asher t'yasrenu Hashem, u'm'Toratecha t'lamdenu* — Fortunate is the one who gets *yissurim* from Hashem, and whom You teach from Your Torah.” The one who understands this **treasure** (of *yissurim*) and learns from them, will have no desire to abandon this wealth.

**This concept of *Simcha b'Yissurim*, however, is not only for special individuals, but rather for all of *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people).** We see this clearly from the *Mishnah* in *Brachot* as explained by the *Gemara* — that accepting *yissurim* with *simcha* is an **obligation** on **every** single Jew. This *simcha* comes through two different approaches — proper recognition of *gashmiyut* (physicality) and proper recognition of *ruchniyut* (spirituality).

It is obvious that we are incapable of evaluating what is truly *tov* (good) and what is truly *ra'ah* (bad) even when it comes to *gashmiyut* — the physical dimension. People are cognizant only of their immediate surroundings, and only in terms of the present moment...

*Simcha b'yissurim* [is] *simcha* from the awareness of our limitations in knowing what may be close by or what may occur quite soon. The very *ra'ah* that we find ourselves in may certainly be a mistaken [perception] — it may be what is actually forming the *tov* that will be evident soon...

After all, everything originates from the same source, from the source of boundless *tov* and *chessed*. This is the first approach to *simcha b'yissurim*, based on the proper recognition of *gashmiyut*.

The second approach to *simcha b'yissurim*, based on the proper recognition of *ruchniyut*, is based on our awareness [that every single person] is beloved in the eyes of Hashem. The verse says — “*et asher ye'ehav Hashem yochiach* — G-d chastises because of His love for a person”... In order to try to rescue the *rasha* from his transgressions, [even he is given] *yissurim* in the hope that he will turn from his evil path and be able to merit eternal life. *Yissurim* are the final attempt to get one to do *teshuva*.

This *ahavah*, which expresses itself in *yissurim*, is not limited to trying to rescue the *reshayim* from *Gehenom*, but also works to elevate [everyone else] up to higher and higher levels of positive development...

It is specifically because of G-d's great love for the *tzadik* that He gives him *yissurim shel ahavah* — as a *nisayon* (test), and to elevate him through the *yissurim* to a much higher level than he could have ever gotten to without them.

*Nisyonot* (tests) as a means of elevation are an entirely separate matter; they are the path to elevation for the greatest of human beings. This path to elevation can also involve *yissurim*, and is included in the verse — “*et asher ye'ehav Hashem yochiach* — G-d chastises the one that He loves.” A special love can be seen in *yissurim*, love for the *tzadikim* and [even] love for the *reshayim*.

**One must, however, be very careful that *simcha b'yissurim* not become *mivat b'yissurim* (a type of rebellious apathy in regard to *yissurim*)...**

The difference between the two is one's feelings. *Simcha b'yissurim* means one that feels the *yissurim*, with all of their intensity, as *ra'ah* and not *tov*, *emmet* (truth) and not *chessed*, *din* (judgment) and not *rachamim* (mercy), and he therefore makes the *bracha*, “*Dayan HaEmet*” (“The True Judge”) and not “*HaTov v'HaMeitiv*” (“The One Who is good and does good”). But at the same time he is also obligated — “*likbulinhu b'simcha*” (to accept the *yissurim* with *simcha*) — to feel as much *simcha* on the *ra'ah* as he feels on the *tov* [since both come from Hashem's love]. A full *simcha* together with a complete recognition of the [pain and difficulty of the] *ra'ah* is a true *simcha shel ahavah* (of love).

One who doesn't really feel the [pain and difficulty of the] *yissurim*, however, and has simply become accustomed to them over a long period of time, until they have become like second nature to him, like the *Churban* (destruction of the Temple) and *galut* (exile) today, and is content to continue living a life like this; this person is not *same'ach* in his *yissurim*, but rather *mivat* (apathetic) in them. He is rebelling against these agents of Hashem and against the tangible *tochacha* (rebuke) which he has been given, besides making himself deaf to hearing their messages. At the same time, however, he thinks in his heart that he is a *tzadik* since he seems completely uninterested in all matters of this world. It doesn't bother him that he is living a life of pain and difficulty, since [he thinks] this shows that he is neither finicky nor arrogant.

**In truth, however, this is not a person who is minimizing his importance in a positive way, but rather one who is maximizing his insignificance in a very negative manner.**

He is actually closing his ear from listening and preventing his heart from understanding — not only ideas, but also feelings. He is not only very distant from one who truly loves Hashem, he is far removed from **regular** people with **normal** feelings as well.

*Simcha b'yissurim* first of all requires feelings and sensitivities towards life, where even the smallest pain will be significant to him. He needs to appreciate that *Yisrael* are *b'nei melachim* (the children of royalty) and, therefore, no one even stubs his toe in this world without an explicit decree above, in *Shamayim* (Heaven). Consequently, “when one puts his hand into his pocket to take out three coins but manages to remove only two” [*Gemara Arachin* 16b] — even such a small discomfort like this is considered a subtle aspect of *yissurim*. One who lives like this and is *same'ach* in his *yissurim* through recognizing just how limited the physical world is, or through his recognition of the great love that is expressed through them, this is one who has true *simcha b'yissurim*.

### **The Torat Avraham (Shleimut v'Yissurim — aleph) continued:**

Up until this point we have spoken about the greatness of utilizing our thoughts and our feelings to attain very lofty goals. However, these types of ideas that *Chazal* (the Sages) tell us — about accepting *yissurim* — are not so obvious to the masses. The majority of people aren't such deep thinkers and most don't have enough time to contemplate such things. They do, however, still receive *yissurim*. Aren't their *yissurim* also included within the verse — “*et asher ye'ehav Hashem yochiach* — G-d chastises the one that He loves?” If so, we need to understand what type of a love can be found within *yissurim* to those who are largely devoid of thinking.

*Yissurim* contain two different benefits:

1. They push a person to examine his ways and to do *teshuva* (return to G-d).
2. *Yissurim* [inherently] provide a *kaparah* for one's *aveirot* in this world [similar to how *Gehenom* purifies the *neschama* after death], sometimes before *teshuva* and sometimes following *teshuva*, through the weakening of the body and its desires.

It is self-evident that if one understands the real purpose of *yissurim*, one will examine his ways and do *teshuva*. Then, even the mildest of *yissurim* will be able to help cleanse the most severe of transgressions. However, even one without understanding, who lives his life like a horse racing through a battle, never stopping to think or consider his actions, and certainly never engaging in *teshuva*, will still benefit and be elevated from *yissurim*... *Yissurim* **always** have the inherent ability to perfect the *nefesh* of every single person.

This special quality of *yissurim* to elevate will be effective even when the *yissurim* become “*melumada*” (habitual) and lack both thinking and feeling. This lack of [both] thinking and feeling is relevant only to the first goal of *yissurim* — the examination of one's ways. In terms of the second goal of *yissurim*, however, *shleimut* (completion or perfection) of the soul of the person through the weakening of the body and its desires — this occurs automatically, independent of whether one does or does not think about the *yissurim*...

However, not only when one's *yissurim* become habitual will they still benefit him in terms of this second approach; they will benefit him even when he doesn't want their impact at all, and they only pain him greatly, leaving him broken-hearted. We might think that this type of a person would get no benefit at all from these *yissurim*, neither a benefit from thinking about them, nor from the actual *yissurim* themselves. On the contrary, we might think that these *yissurim* would simply cause him more anger and destruction. However, when we do look into this, we see that even one like this will be elevated through his *yissurim*. Was there ever anyone more bitter than *Iyov*? His continual cursing and complaining actually turned him into a transgressor, even though he

was never held responsible for these “transgressions of the heart,” since no one is ever held responsible for his pain...

In the end, however, it was actually the *yissurim* that helped Iyov to remain steadfast in his *nisayon* (test and challenge) and not to transgress with his lips. And this allowed him to continue receiving *nevuah* (prophecy) all throughout his long *nisayon*, even though he was filled with anger and bitterness without limit. Even these *yissurim* ultimately help one to acquire a higher level of *shleimut*, and are also in the category of — “G-d chastises the one that He loves.”

### **Rav Shlomo Wolbe wrote in the *Alei Shur* (*Savlanut, vaad t'shi'i*):**

“Those with *simcha* in their *yissurim* are described as...being totally fulfilled... Our Sages have revealed to us that the one who has achieved “total fulfillment” is specifically the one who can bear his burden. The person who can bear *yissurim*, and also have *simcha* in them is the strongest one of all... The entire world is established specifically in the merit of one who is able to bear his burden quietly.

One who bears *yissurim* is viewed by the world only with pity; they certainly wouldn't attribute strength to him. [However,] it is possible that he is even greater than one with many [good] deeds. G-d should protect us from *yissurim* — but we need to know that one bearing *yissurim*, and even carrying them with *simcha* without allowing his spirit to be broken by them, is actually the greatest of the great...

We can [also] apply this to the Jewish people during their exile. “Our Rabbis taught — We ask one who comes to convert during [the exile] — “What did you see that made you want to convert? Don't you know that during this time *Yisrael* is afflicted, pressured, oppressed and torn, and that *yissurim* are coming upon them?” If he says, “I know and I feel unworthy of this,” then we accept him” (*Gemara Yevamos 47a*). Rashi explains his reply — “I feel unworthy” — as “I am unworthy to share in their suffering. If only I would merit to do so!”

Behold, this is the state of the Jewish people during the exile — to bear the burden of difficulties — and this is specifically the greatness of this holy nation. They can deal with their pain and not be broken by it. This is their strength. And only one who recognizes this greatness is able to become a proper convert...

We must know that this itself is the greatness of the Jewish people — that they can deal with their *yissurim* and [still] carry the Torah with exalted strength and without fear, and without minimizing nor rejecting the *yissurim* of the exile.”

Hashem should protect us, our families, and all of *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish People) from difficult and painful *yissurim*.

But at the same time, we need to know and remember that He **will** give us whatever *yissurim* we require — for our benefit, and because of His great love for us.

Sometimes we may see that benefit clearly in *Olam Ha'zeh*, and sometimes we may have to wait until *Olam Haba* to see it.

In all cases, however, we also need to know and remember that *yissurim* teach and guide us, provide a tremendous *kaparah*, help us to actualize our potential, bring us closer to G-d, and weaken our attachment to physicality in this temporal and transient *Olam Ha'zeh*, to purify us in preparation for the eternity of *Olam Haba*.

Through the understanding which is possible to get only from the Torah, Hashem should help us, in the words of the Shabbat davening (prayers), to feel satisfaction from even this type of goodness, and *simcha* from even this aspect of salvation. He should help us not merely to endure our *yissurim*, but to actually grow and gain from them in **both** *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba*.

**This should be *I'zechut ul'iluy nishmat Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun***