

Understanding and Dealing with *Nisyonot* — Part 3 — 3 *Mashalim* (Analogies), Tests for *Tzadikim* (Righteous) vs. Everyone

Medrashim with the three *Mashalim* (Analogies)

Bereshit Rabba (32:3) tells us:

“Hashem tests the *tzadik*, but He hates the soul of the *rasha* (evil one) and the lover of violence.”

The craftsman does not test defective **vessels** because they cannot withstand even a single blow without breaking. And which ones does He check? The strong vessels — even if he would bang on them many times, they wouldn't break. Similarly, G-d does not test the wicked but only the righteous... When a flax worker knows that his **flax** is good, [he knows that] the more he beats it the more it improves and changes. And when he knows that the flax is bad, [he knows that] it will not be able to withstand even a single blow without breaking. Similarly, G-d does not test the wicked but only the righteous...

When a person has two **bulls**, one of which is strong and the other weak, upon which one does he place the yoke? Isn't it on the strong one? Similarly G-d tests only the *tzadikim*.

Also Bereshit Rabba (Parshat Noach — 32:3), Bereshit Rabba (Parshat Noach — 34:2), Bereshit Rabba (Parshat Vayera — 55:2), Shir HaShirim (2:35), Medrash Tehillim (Socher Tov #11), Yalkut Shimoni — Tehillim (247/654)

The **Meforshim** (commentaries) discuss these *medrashim* —

The concept of these three *mashalim* (analogies) is to teach us that a *nisayon* has three different aspects. A *nisayon* could be for the sake of the tester — the one being tested — or for the onlookers. And since these *medrashim* tell us that Hashem tests only the *tzadik*, they bring *mashalim* which are fitting specifically for a *tzadik* to be tested.

The *mashal* of the **vessels**, where the good one is hit, is not to improve it, but rather to see **how strong** it is. This is for the sake of the buyers who see that the merchandise is good [i.e., for publicity]. The righteousness of the *tzadik* needs to be completely expressed in terms of *midat hadin* (the quality of justice), and not remain merely in potential. The *tzadikim* are evaluated and tested so that people will know their accomplishments, and why Hashem gave them benefit. This is also [so to speak] for the sake of Hashem, the Tester — to publicize His love, without any suspicion that He was [unfairly] favoring the *tzadik*, G-d forbid. This is the matter of Avraham and requires the *nisayon* to be on a *mitzvat aseï* (positive commandment), so that others will see what a wondrous thing he actually did, like the *Akeidah*, to fulfill the *mitzvat aseï*.

The *mashal* of the **flax**, where it is struck, is not to see how strong it is, but rather to **improve** it and fix it. Through the banging, it becomes white and pure. With this *nisayon*, which Hashem uses to test the *tzadik*, He will bring **yissurim shel ahavah** (difficulties from love) upon him to cleanse and purify his soul. This *nisayon* is for the sake of the person himself. His actions should improve through the *nisyonot* which he stood up to, to purify and prepare him in terms of his *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d)

This will remove impurities of the *yetzer hara* (negative inclination) from him, to purify him, like one purifies silver. This could [even] involve bringing him to [a situation where he may be tempted to] transgress, and then beginning a war between his *yetzer hatov* (positive inclination) and his *yetzer hara* (negative inclination). In his righteousness he will be able to conquer the *yetzer hara*.

This is a *nisayon* through [the temptation of] a transgression. [And, for example,] this is the matter of Yosef, and similar cases.

And, finally, the *mashal* of the **bull** is neither to see how strong it is, nor to improve it. Rather, it is referring to a situation where its owner has many **burdens** and is testing his bull — perhaps it can carry more [for the sake of the world], which will [also] be good for it. The more the bull can carry, the more food [i.e., *s'char* (spiritual benefit)] the owner will give it afterwards.

Yissurim and *nisyonot* sometimes come upon a *tzadik*, [instead of] Hashem bringing negative decrees **upon the world**. The *tzadik* is able to bear the decrees for the sake of the entire world, to atone for them, and to protect them. This is compared to the two bulls, where the yoke is placed on the stronger one. Similarly, when Hashem wants to bring the yoke of His decrees for the transgressions of the world, He brings it on the strong ones, who are able to stand up to His decrees and His yoke.

Hashem tests the *tzadik*, by bringing *yissurim* upon him, to test whether he will accept them with love, for the sake of the generation, without rebelling. This is learned from Noach, since the yoke of *yissurim* were placed upon Noach in the ark.

Any one of these three aspects could explain why a *tzadik* is given a *nisayon*.

Sometimes he is tested like a **vessel**, to know how strong he is in his righteousness.

Other times he is like the **flax**, which is able to be improved by the *nisayon*.

And he can also be compared to the **bull**. When Hashem needs to give a large *onesh* (negative consequences for bad behavior) to the generation, He may place a large amount on the *tzadik* (righteous person) and afterwards give him much *s'char* (benefit).

(**Netziv, HaEmek Davar** — *Bereshit* 22:1 — *Akeidah*, **Malbim** — *Bereshit* 22 — *Akeidah*, — *Derech Chaim* — *Pirkei Avot* 5:3, **HaMarzu** — quoted by Maharal in *Derech Chaim* — *Pirkei Avot* 5:3, and **Alshich** — *Bereshit* 22:1 — *Akeidah*)

***Yissurim shel Ahavah* (Difficulties and Challenges from Love)**

The **Maharal** (*Pirkei Avot* 5:3) writes:

There is another [type of] *nisayon* which Hashem uses to test the *tzadik*. He will bring *yissurim shel ahavah* upon him to cleanse and purify his soul through *yissurim*.

These are only relevant for a *tzadik* where Hashem desires to purify his soul.

The Maharal (*Netiv HaYissurim* — *perek aleph*) explains that *yissurim shel ahavah* involve a *tzadik* who is fitting for a lofty elevation, but in terms of his body, there is an aspect which is not appropriate for that level. Since the limitation of the *tzadik* for that level is because of his physical orientation, Hashem brings *yissurim* upon him to purify his soul, which is clinging to physicality. This will minimize his physicality, and thereby bring him to that upper level which he would [otherwise] not be able to merit... These are, therefore, called *yissurim shel ahavah*, since Hashem loves him, and wants to bring this *tzadik* close to Him, and to cling to Him.

The **Torat Avraham** (*Simcha b'Yissurim*) points out —

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) are the path to elevation for the greatest of human beings. This elevation can also involve *yissurim*, and is included in the verse — “*et asher ye'ehav Hashem yochiach* — G-d chastises the one whom He loves.” A special love can be seen in *yissurim*.

***Nisyonot* Are Sometimes for the Sake of the Generation**

The **Alshich** (*Bereshit* 22:1 — *Bereshit Rabba* (*Parshat Vayera*) — 55:2) writes:

Hashem tests the *tzadik* by bringing *yissurim* upon him to see whether he will accept them with love for the sake of the generation... He is bearing *yissurim* to atone for them and to protect them, regarding their illnesses and their pain.

The **Maharal** (*Chidushei Aggadot* 3:156) adds: The *tzadik* receives an *onesh* (negative consequences for bad behavior) since he is part of the *klal* (community), and the community went bad. And although

there was no transgression within the *tzadik* as an individual, he does have a transgression in him in terms of being a member of a community which transgressed.

The **Rambam** (*Moreh HaNevuchim* 3:24) disagrees with this, and says:

The concept of *nisayon* is very unclear, and is the greatest of the mysteries of the Torah. The Torah mentions it in six places...

What is well known to people in terms of *nisayon* is that G-d will bring afflictions and occurrences to a person, even without that person having transgressed beforehand, in order to increase his *s'char* (benefit). However, this point is not mentioned in the Torah in a clear manner at all... In fact, the Torah actually [tells us] the opposite of this idea. It says — “*Keil emunah v'ein avel* — G-d is reliable without any iniquity.” Additionally, not all of the *Chachamim* agreed with this understanding. They have already said — “*Ein misah b'lo chet v'ein yissurin b'lo avon* — there is no death and no difficulty without transgression” (*Shabbat* 55a). This is the understanding that every intelligent *ben Torah* (Torah scholar) needs to have. Not, G-d forbid, to associate any imperfection with G-d, [i.e.,] to believe that someone was innocent from transgression and still got paid [with difficulties], even though he was not obligated for what befell him.

We Are Never Tested without the Ability to Pass the Test; G-d Tests Only *Tzadikim*

Rav Saadya Gaon (*Emunah V'De'ot* 5:3) spells this out:

G-d does not test a person who cannot endure it — because it would then serve no purpose.

Rabbeinu Bachye (*Shemot* 13:17 — Intro to *Beshalach*) adds:

It is well known that “G-d tests only the righteous” (*Tehillim* 11:15).

The **Ran** (*Derashot* #6) also writes — A test occurs only with a *tzadik* who will be able to stand up to it.

The Zohar (*Bereshit* 140a) explains:

G-d is very strict with the *tzadikim* in all they do since He knows that they will not deviate to the right or left, and therefore he tests them...to glorify them even more. For example, concerning Avraham (*Berishit* 22:1), it says — “*V'haElokim nisah et Avraham* — G-d tested Avraham.”

The **Ramban** (*Bereshit* 22:1, *Sha'ar HaGemul* #3) quotes the verse (*Tehillim* 11:15) — “Hashem examines [only] the *tzadik*” —

When He knows the *tzadik* will fulfill His will, and He wants to enhance his righteousness, He commands him to do some *nisayon*. But He does not examine the *resha'im* (wicked) who would not listen. Therefore, all *nisyonot* in the Torah are for the benefit of the one being tested.

Siftei Chaim (*Parshat Va'era* — *Akeidah*) discusses the same verse — “Hashem tests only a *tzadik*” — He knows that the *tzadik* can pass it and bring his potential out to actuality. With a *beinoni* (middle type of person), however, who is equally likely to choose good or bad, and it is doubtful whether he will pass the test, Hashem doesn't test him.

The **Malbim** (*Iyov* 36:7) brings in a deeper point —

Hashgacha Pratit (Divine Supervision) is continually with the *tzadik*, and not removed [from him] even for an instant. Furthermore, the nature of this *hashgacha* is related to the deeds of the *tzadik*. To the degree that he increases his righteousness and attachment to G-d, the *hashgacha* will apply to every detail of his activities. However, there is an additional aspect of this intense personal *hashgacha* — he is exposed to constant testing. Since G-d attends carefully to every aspect of his existence, like one who supervises his dearly beloved only son, his righteousness, perfection and spiritual aspirations are fully examined, and this is the issue of *nisayon*.

And, finally, **Rav Aryeh Kaplan** (Guidebook to Jewish Thought — 3:55) explains — Although G-d might guide or test man, the final choice between good and evil ultimately rests with the individual [himself].

Every normal person can always control his actions, if he only tries hard enough. Man was created to be master of his fate, and as such, he bears the full responsibility for it.

Everyone Is Tested

The **Medrash** (*Shemot Rabba* 31:3 — *Parshat Mishpatim*) tells us:

Fortunate is the one who stands up to his *nisayon*, since there is no person whom Hashem doesn't test. The wealthy one is tested whether his hand will be open to the poor, and the poor one is tested whether he will be able to accept his *yissurim* (difficulties and challenges) without anger... This world is like a wheel. Not everyone who is wealthy today is wealthy tomorrow, and not everyone who is poor today is poor tomorrow...as it says in *Tehillim* 75:8 — “Hashem is the Judge, this one goes down and this one goes up.”

The **Ramchal** emphasizes (in *Mesilat Yesharim* — Chapter 1):

Everything in this world, whether for good or bad, is a test for a person. Poverty on the one side and wealth on the other...tranquility on one side and *yissurim* on the other side, until you find that there is a battle upon him, [both] in front and from behind.

He elaborates on this (in *Derech Hashem* — 2:3:1):

We have already discussed the fact that man's task is to exist and choose good in a world containing both good and evil...

In order for these qualities to exist, it was necessary that individuals be divided into different situations in life. Each of these circumstances is then a test for a particular individual...

The rich person is tested by his wealth if he will be cruel towards the poor person who needs him, or if he will be merciful towards him. And similarly, the poor person is tested to see if he will be satisfied with the little in his hand, and thank G-d, or the opposite...

The Highest Wisdom divided these challenges among the human race in a manner decreed fitting and proper to fulfill its profound plan.

Every individual has his particular *nisayon* and battle against the *yeitzer*. This is his task and responsibility in this world...his deeds are then judged by G-d's attribute of Justice with true precision, depending on the particular responsibility which was given to him.

Rav Dessler (*Michtav M'Elياهو* — 1:23) writes:

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

Rav Yehoshua Hartman, in his notes (#334, 354) on the Maharal (*Pirkei Avot* 5:3) discusses an apparent contradiction between two different *medrashim* —

One *Medrash* (*Tehillim* 11:5 — “Hashem tzadik yivchan — Hashem evaluates the righteous”) says that Hashem tests only the *tzadik*. However, a different *Medrash* (*Shemot Rabba* 31:3) tells us — “Fortunate is the one who stands up to his test, since there is no person whom Hashem doesn't test.”

Rav Hartman explains — Hashem does test every person, and not only *tzadikim*. *Nisyonot* which are given within the context of one's *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d), are certainly given to all people as a necessary part of their *avodat Hashem*. No one is exempt from that. The whole concept of life is for a person to bring his potential to actuality, and this happens only through standing up to tests.

However, *nisyonot* which are given in order that one's righteousness be completely and openly expressed within *midat hadin* (the attribute of justice), are certainly done only for *tzadikim*, and not for other people. Regular people are tested [only] with *nisyonot* which don't deviate from the principles of *teva* (nature), according to their level which is within *teva*. The *nisayon* is the result of the level of the one being tested, while it is also the cause to bring the level of the one being tested from potential to actuality.

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