

Understanding & Dealing with *Nisyonot* — Part 4 — Tests Are Essential for Growth, Dealing with & Passing Tests, The Meaning of Passing Our Tests

Nisyonot and *Yissurim* Are Good for Us, We Need Them to Grow

The *Medrash Tanchuma* (*Nitzavim* 1) asks:

“Why are we (the Jewish people) still existing, while many of the non-Jewish nations have been destroyed? Because, when *yissurim* come upon them, they rebel from 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 difficulties 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 good for you in the end.’”

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 1:101) discusses the concept of *nisyonot* (tests): The secret and essence of *avodat ha'adam* (the work of a person) is specifically through the *yetzer hara* [to challenge us], which is an integral part of the creation. And if the *yetzer hara* would be nullified, then human beings would necessarily also be nullified, since people attain greatness and completion exclusively through the *yetzer hara*. While this matter is among the secrets of the Torah and the creation, our experience also demonstrates its truth to us...since the secret to success for all of the great people is specifically from the *yetzer hara*. Their greatness and elevation, higher and higher, is from the *yetzer* and *nisayon* (challenge). This principle, that the entire work and success of a person is through the *yetzer*, needs to be clear to a person from experience alone, even without any type of religious belief. Life itself testifies to this matter as a basic understanding...

There is a common mistake in thinking that the *yetzer* was created to hurt people. Rather...this is the principle with the *yetzer*: If one is not meritorious — it opposes him, but if one is meritorious — then all of his love, *Olam Haba* (world to come), and perfection come exclusively from the *yetzer*...

The essence and reality of this world is like a swamp, and in terms of this swamp, we are told (*Pirkei Avot* 4:21) — “This world is compared to a corridor leading to *Olam Haba*.” It is specifically through this swamp, exclusively from this filth, that a person is able to reach *Olam Haba*...

Every aspect of this world is a huge challenge for the soul of a person. The work of a man is to go specifically through the swamp. Not only should one not hold himself back from entering the swamp, but the entire secret of his *avodah* (service of G-d) is specifically to walk through the swamp... In other words, the whole secret of his success is specifically when he is surrounded by *nisyonot* on every side. According to this, not only should one not run away from a situation of difficulties and *nisyonot*, but on the contrary, all the aspirations of a person should be to sit and long for when a situation of *nisayon* and *yetzer hara* will come upon him, since that is all which will lead him to success... And the greater the challenge, *nisayon*, and *yetzer* will be, the greater will be the success...

This is the entire foundation of Torah and *mitzvot* — the beginning of a person is only in a place of *nisyonot* and the *yetzer*...

As we have explained, all the *avodah* (service of G-d) of a person and his success is specifically in a situation of difficulties. And the more *nisyonot* one has...only in these situations is the holy Torah. This is where all of the *avodah* of a person is, and this is what the verse means when it says — “*adam l'amal yulad* — man was born to toil.”

[**Rav Yerucham** (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 1:102) explains further:]

The greatness of man [among all of the creations] is that only he has the ability to walk through the challenges...

The *Gemara Eruvin* (65b) tells us — “A man is recognized through three things — *b'kiso* (with his money), *b'koso* (with his drinking), and *b'ka'aso* (with his anger).” Specifically at the time of one's anger, at the moment when he is burning up inside, at the time when it [may even be] permissible for him to be angry, that is where he is recognized. To the degree that he overcomes this challenge of anger, as much as he is able to continue on his way, and transcends his character traits, that is the degree that he is human...

Character traits are appropriately known as “*middot*,” meaning “measurements,” since they need to be measured very exactly. Even in a situation of difficulty and *nisyonot*, we need to act within all of the guidelines of the Torah to the utmost precision...

This is the greatness and elevation of a person, particularly at a time of challenge, when anger is permissible, and when one needs to deal with difficulty. In a situation like this, to attain one's goal without deviating even a hairsbreadth, is the entire secret of the elevation of a person...

We see the incredible guidance, in terms of how great and serious our *avodah* (Divine service) is, which comes out to every person from this. We explained that the foundation of our *avodah* is exclusively in a situation of difficulty, *nisyonot*, and obstacles...

The essence of every person is particularly in a situation like this where one really embraces this challenge. If so, how truly great and awesome is this *avodah*?! **{#59}**

Rav Yerucham (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 1:101) also points out:

Chazal (our Sages of blessed memory) faulted Yaakov Avinu for requesting to dwell in tranquility (*bikeish leisheiv b'shalvah*)... [They explained that] a person's aspiration not only needs to completely avoid *shalvah*, but one should actually long and wait for difficulties and challenges — “When will they come upon me so I will be able to fulfill them?”

And, finally, **Rav Yerucham** (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 2:44) concludes:

The concept of *nisyonot* is not incidental in the world. Rather, every day of a person's life, one stands regularly in *nisayon*, since the whole concept of *nisayon* is from the principle of “*Eretz nitna b'yad rasha* — the land is given to the hand of the evil one.” In fact, there is no detail at all within the creation which is not involved in *nisayon*...and it is impossible to achieve anything except through *nisayon*. It is specifically from the negative that we attain all of the good.

However, the **Sifsei Chaim** (*Parshat Va'era* — *Akeidah*) cautions us:

Although one needs to prepare himself for a *nisayon*, one also needs to distance himself from a *nisayon*... We should be afraid of a *nisayon* since we don't know if we will be able to stand up to it... Just like with *yissurim*, the Sages in the *Gemara* (*Brachot* 5b) said — “*lo hein v'lo s'charan* — We want neither them nor their benefit”...even though their benefit may be enormous. Because of their *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven), they worried that they might not be able to stand up to the *nisayon* of *yissurim*.

And while we should never ask for a *nisayon*, and we even *daven* (pray) every morning that Hashem should **not** give us a *nisayon*, **Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — 1:23) offers a fascinating insight: While we are in this world we [certainly] can't know, but it is very possible that if we could ask a *neshama* (soul) before it would descend to here — “Which portion will you choose — to pass through the passageway [of *Olam Ha'zeh* — this world] with wealth and comfort, or [will you choose] the path of poverty and difficulty?” — it is very easy to understand that it would choose the path of difficulties, because a person whose heart is broken is much closer to thinking what his purpose is with his soul.”

Tests Allow Us to Fulfill Our Purpose in This World

Netivot Shalom — Parshat Va'era — Inyan HaNisyonot:

Aleph — Just like Avraham Avinu was tested with ten tests, similarly every Jew is given ten tests during his lifetime...and through these tests he fulfills his *shlichut* (mission) in this world. We see from the words of the Ramban, that the true greatness of Avraham Avinu was not his fulfillment of the entire Torah, but rather that he stood up to his ten tests...

And similarly, with every Jew, who needs to deal with ten tests, it is possible that he will fulfill the entire Torah but still not begin to fulfill the *shlichut* for which he came down to this world...

The purpose of the entire Torah and all of the *mitzvot*, is *ahavat Hashem* (love of G-d) and *deveikut* (clinging) to Hashem. The ten tests are what reveal and demonstrate one's love and *deveikut* to Hashem.

Beit — The Baal Shem Tov wrote on the verse — “Hashem is testing you” — that this world is called *Olam HaNisayon* (the world of tests). And the entire goal of the *neshama* of a Jew descending to this world is to stand up to tests. Tests surround all the different stages of the life of a Jew. In one's early years one has tests which are relevant to that stage, aspects of desire and inconvenience. And with the

later years, whatever is relevant to that time. The greatest *nisayon* of all is...for a person not to rebel from all of the *yissurim* (difficulties and challenges) which come upon him, but rather to accept them with love.

Gimmel — With all the tests of life which a Jew passes through...if he realizes that they are all connected to the lofty *shlichut* which he came down to this world to fulfill, then it is already easier for him to strengthen himself to stand up to these *nisyonot*...

The advice regarding *nisyonot* is to know the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov on the verse — “*V'anochi hasteir astir panai* — And I will surely hide My face (literally — And I will hide-hide My face)” — [the verse is referring to] a double hiding. Hashem is even hiding the hiding, until we don't feel there is any hiding here at all... When a Jew has a clear *emunah* (strong belief) that Hashem is hiding Himself in the midst of the darkness, he is then strengthening himself to be able to stand up to all of the tests... Hashem never gives tests to a Jew which he is not able to stand up to. Rather, at the good times, one needs to prepare one's strength for all situations. And, at the time of the *nisayon*, the main thing is clarity of *emunah*, that a Jew realize that Hashem is found in the midst of the darkness. Through this, he will be able to get through everything...

With every *nisayon* which comes upon a person, one needs to stand up in *tefillah* (prayer). He needs to know that there is no solution other than to ask Hashem to help him so he will be able to overpower his *yetzer*.

Daled — There is a special elevation with *nisyonot*, since from *nisyonot* a Jew moves forward, grows, and is elevated. We see this in the *Medrash (Rabba 55:6)* on the verse — “*V'Elokim nisah* — And G-d tested” — Rebbe Yossi HaGalili says — He grew like the mast (*neis*) of a ship, since he was very elevated and visible from a distance...

The *nisyonot* which Hashem gives to a Jew are a gift from Heaven for his benefit, since through the *nisyonot* which occur to a Jew, he moves forward and grows. They are a present for him and his descendants after him, like the *nisayon* of the *Akeidah*, the power of which we live from until today. And in all times of difficulties we mention the *Akeidat Yitzchak* to awaken mercy...

The entire life of a Jew is filled with *nisyonot*. He needs to know that whatever happens to him is a test, it is an opportunity to elevate himself and grow, according to his level. And, on the other side, he could also fall through this, G-d forbid. This very knowledge, that a Jew knows this is a test from Heaven, gives him the strength to persevere and stand up to the *nisayon*...

The entire life of a Jew depends on tests. For one person there are easier conditions, and his life flows in a pleasant stream; for another one, the conditions of his life are very difficult; and there is [even] one who can't acquire anything without great difficulty. All of these are the tests of life which Hashem gives to a Jew according to the *shoresh* of his *neshama* (the root of his soul).

Dealing with and Passing *Nisyonot*

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 1:104) writes:

Yesod gadol b'avodat Hashem — The entire work of a person is only with what is natural and the simplest for him. Through guarding these natural areas, which would seem to be very easy, since they are part of his nature from his conception, and he has a leaning towards them in terms of his natural qualities, this is the secret of one's *shleimut* (perfection)...

Guarding these inborn *ma'alot* (positive qualities), without deviating to the right or left, will give him the ability, bit by bit, to strengthen himself and overcome his natural negative qualities, until he turns them all to the good...

The foundation of this is that the Creator never gives a person anything superfluous... Every single *ma'alah* which is given to him for his task is necessary for him to express. Wisdom, wealth, and strength are all *ma'alot*...and without them, it would be impossible to achieve a recognition of Hashem... We find [therefore,] that one's *ma'alot* are the very obligations he needs to express...

And, in contrast, if one doesn't perfect his *ma'alot*, by expressing all which needs to be expressed from himself, this will lead to all of the *onesh* (negative consequences for his behavior).

Therefore, Yosef, who was inherently *kadosh* (holy), was tested specifically through this [*kedusha* — holiness] with the wife of Potifar... He didn't deviate from his *ma'alah*, and actually fulfilled it with all of its obligations.

And similarly, Yehuda who had the inherent *ma'alah* of *hoda'ah* (admitting a mistake), was required to express it [in the *nisayon* with Tamar]... And the greatness of Yehuda was [specifically] through utilizing this *ma'alah* and fulfilling it completely.

We find that the fulfillment of every *ma'alah* is only after withstanding the *nisayon* which expresses it properly. This encompasses the *avodah* of a person, and it determines all of the *gemul* (positive consequences) on the one side, and all of the *onesh* (negative consequences) on the other side...

A very elevated person who doesn't utilize his *ma'alah* to its full obligation, will end up much lower than one who never actually received that *ma'alah*. We can bring a proof to this from the obligation to give *ma'aser* (10%) of one's crops. The one to whom G-d gave 100 *kor* of grain is obligated to give 10 *kor*, while the one to whom G-d gave 10 *kor* is obligated to give only 1 *kor*...

Accordingly, this explains what is said in the name of Rav Yisrael Salant — “I know that the intelligence I have is equal to that of 1000 people, but corresponding to this, my obligation of *avodah* (service) is that of 1000 people.”

Together with the greatness of the *ma'alah* is also the enormity of the *avodah*...

And, in the future, we will need to give a *din v'cheshbon* (full accounting) for every *ma'alah*, quality, and positive ability which has been placed within us.

[Rav Yerucham (*Da'at Chachmah uMussar* — 2:49) says furthermore:]

When Hashem expects something of a person, He gives him whatever He will need to fulfill it ahead of time... A person is never tested unless he is first given the ability to stand up to that test...

We imagine that we were given *Ma'amad Har Sinai* (the Revelation at Mount Sinai) for the sole purpose of experiencing the revelation itself... [But, in fact,] the [deeper] purpose of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* was that, afterwards, we would be able to be tested... This is, after all, the true purpose of everything — only to be tested.

[Similarly,] when a person experiences much enlightenment, he may imagine that its purpose is the enlightenment which he has right then. He doesn't understand that the purpose of the awareness he is experiencing now is only for the time when he will be tested with darkness afterwards... Since he previously saw everything with such a great degree of clarity, [he should understand that] the darkness he has now is because Hashem is testing him. We [often react] in the opposite manner. When the darkness comes, we don't connect it to the past. Rather, the previous [enlightenment] is forgotten completely, and we are left with only darkness. This is because we are completely unaware of this concept that Hashem is [always] testing us.

The *Sifsei Chaim* (*Parshat Va'era* — *Akeidah*) elaborates on this —

When a person knows from the outset that Hashem is able to test him with difficulties...and he prepares himself for this, he will then have the ability to stand up to the *nisayonot*.

Rabeinu Tam (*Sefer HaYashar* — *Sha'ar Vav*) wrote — “A person has *yemei ahavah v'yemei sinah* (days of love and days of hate), days which are good and smooth...and [days] when one is struck by all types of difficulty. During the *yemei ahavah*, one needs to prepare himself for the *yemei sinah*...

[Therefore,] he needs to prepare himself to increase his *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) in order to be able to stand up to the difficult situation afterwards... If, however, one seeks out advice on how to increase his *yirat Shamayim*, in order to stand up to this *nisayon*, only in the midst of the *nisayon* itself, it [may] already be too late. But if he prepares himself right away during the *yemei ahavah*, and thinks about the situations where he will need to strengthen himself to be able to stand up to these [later] difficulties, then he will have the strength to stand up to the *nisayon* during the *yemei sinah*.

The nature of people is to imagine that things will always be good when they are going well, and not to prepare themselves [for future challenges]. And, during difficult periods, we [may] think that things will always be difficult, and give up on ourselves. We, therefore, need to hang onto the good times in order to prepare ourselves to deal with the difficult times [afterwards].

The *Sifsei Chaim* (*Parshat Va'era* — *Akeidah*) adds:

The *yetzer hara* challenged Avraham before the *Akeida* — “Will you be able to stand up to another *nisayon* [afterwards] even greater than this one?”

Avraham responded — “I will be able to stand up to one even greater than this.”

It is difficult to understand this attempt of the *yetzer hara* to prevent Avraham from the *nisayon* [of the *Akeidah*] by claiming that — tomorrow you may be tested with an even greater test that you will be

unable to pass. If, and when, the bigger test does come tomorrow, that should be when [Avraham will try to] overcome that second *nisayon*.

The *yetzer hara*, who is well skilled in combat, recognizes very well...that people are [sometimes] afraid to rise to a higher level. Why? Perhaps this will cause them to become bigger *tzadikim*, and a greater degree of *avodat Hashem* will then be demanded from them. The *yetzer hara* came with this claim [to try] to stop [Avraham] before the *nisayon* of the *Akeidah*...

When a person knows clearly what a *nisayon* is, it makes it easier for him to stand up to it. The job of the *yetzer* is to give the person doubts, and to dispute the necessity of the *nisayon*.

The **Sefer Chassidim** (161) cautioned us —

Even if you succeed in overcoming a big *nisayon*, still, **don't believe in yourself until the day of your death**, to say — “Since I didn't transgress in this big thing, I won't transgress any more.” The *yetzer hara* of today is not the same as yesterday. Therefore, even in the same matter, perhaps tomorrow you won't be able to withstand it...

Hashem, Who knows what will be in the future, doesn't [even] believe in His angels and holy ones. You, that your thoughts change from good to bad, all the more so, you shouldn't believe [in yourself]. As the verse says (*Mishlei* 28:14) — “Fortunate is the one who is always afraid,” since he won't transgress.

The **Gemara Sanhedrin** (107a) warned:

A person should never bring himself to a *nisayon*. For David, king of Israel, brought himself to a *nisayon*, and he stumbled.

David said — Master of the Universe, why do people say [in their prayers] — “*Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, Elokei Yaakov* — G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak, G-d of Yaakov”, but they don't say — “*Elokei David* — G-d of David”?

He answered — Because they were tested by Me, and you have not been tested by Me.

David said — Try and test me.

Hashem said — I will test you, and I will do something [special] with you. I didn't tell them [that they would be tested], but I am telling you that I will test you [specifically] with a *d'var ervah* (act of illicit relations).

Rabbi Akiva Tatz (in a talk on *Nisyonot* in simpletoremember.com) explains that the essential mistake of King David was to have asked for his own test. His real test was to have kept quiet. We are not allowed to give ourselves *nisyonot*. In fact, every morning in our davening (prayers) we explicitly ask Hashem to **not** give us *nisyonot*.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (*Sichot Mussar* — 5733:6) explained:

The **Gemara Sanhedrin** 107a tells us — “A person should never bring himself to a *nisayon*. For David, king of Israel, brought himself to a *nisayon*, and he stumbled.”

When Hashem gives a *nisayon* to a person, along with the *nisayon*, He [also] **gives** him the strength to stand up to it. Therefore, one should never bring oneself to a *nisayon*. In this situation, where Hashem is not giving the person the *nisayon*, He will also not be giving him the special strength to stand up to it.

This is similar to what the **Gemara Kiddushin** (30b) says:

The *yetzer* (negative inclination) of a person [tries to] overpower him every day, and [even] seeks to kill him...and if Hashem would not help the person, he would be unable to [stand up to] him [the *yetzer*].

In other words, we need to remember that if not for this special help from Hashem, we would be unable to pass **any** of our tests.

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