

Nisyonot — Part 5 — What Does It Actually Mean to Pass a Test?

Sometimes the *Nisayon* Is Not to “Pass It,” but Simply to Deal with It

Rabbi Meir Kahane, a Rebbe at *Aish HaTorah*, discussed, in an essay (*I Want to Be Better but Can't*) what one should do if he finds himself in a situation where it seems he is unable to spiritually improve or grow. And why would Hashem give such a situation to a person, particularly, since the point of challenges is specifically to improve and grow?

He wrote that *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) likely had such questions while in *Mitzrayim* (Egypt). Spiritually, they were sinking lower and lower, to the point that they were on the verge of the fiftieth, and final, level of impurity. The point of *Mitzrayim* was to prepare them to receive the Torah, but the opposite seemed to be happening.

Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Piaszencer Rebbe, described this exact situation in *Aish Kodesh* (*Nitzavim* — 1941), which was compiled in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust:

What can we do when [the Germans] don't permit us to cry out, or even to gather together to pray, and we are forced to pray in secret, and every Jewish heart must lament this alone? In any case, we must cry out about this from the depth of our heart.

Rav Shapira also wrote (*Parshat Vayeishev* — 1941):

We see the destruction of religion and *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d) which the *yissurim* (difficulties and challenges) are causing. And not just that, but all the aspects of Torah and service that our forefathers etched into us as second-nature, and we [did as well] with our children and grandchildren, and so on. The pain is destroying and uprooting the foundations of [Torah and *mitzvot*], in terms of kosher food, *Shabbat*, *mikva*, *chadarim* (schools for children), education in general, and so on.

Be careful and safeguard that, G-d forbid, your *emunah* doesn't get injured even a hairsbreadth... This may be why our Sages (*Mechilta*, *Beshalach*, *Parsha Vav*) told us — Israel was not redeemed from Egypt except through the merit of *emunah*.

Rabbi Kahane continued:

Rav Shapira emphasized that our enemies can take virtually all of our *mitzvot* away from us. But the one thing they cannot take away is our *emunah* (deep belief in G-d). The way for us to grow when it is the most difficult for us to do so, is by working on *emunah*.

When G-d takes away the regular levels of *avodah*, He limits a person's *avodah* to this one area. Sometimes one's *nisayon* is not to “overcome his challenge,” but rather to keep on trying. Only if he would stop trying would it be considered as if he had failed. And since one can never know if his challenge is to actually overcome the test or simply to keep on trying, either way he has to keep on doing the best he can to try to overcome it.

Esther Baila Schwartz spoke to a **Mother's Support Group** in a talk called — **Life: A Nisayon in Progress**:

There is a special *chashivut* (importance), something potentially wonderful, in coping with an ongoing, painful challenge, as raising a child with a disability surely is. I stress *potentially*, because a challenge which one does not manage to meet, can easily destroy a person. It is imperative to recognize that there is no such concept as “once and for all!” in our spiritual endeavors. “Once and for all I am going to get a handle on this situation,” and it's not going to bother me anymore... Even when a person feels she has worked out her *nisayon* and knows how to deal with it, or react to situations or comments thrown her way, some unexpected curve might set her off and she's right back at the beginning. Does that mean she hasn't accomplished anything? Of course she has!

Life, as I see it, is a roller coaster ride. It has its ups and its downs. Have you ever noticed on a roller coaster — how hard it is to get up and how quick and easy it is to get down? You inch your way up and then, because you're human, you crash right down again, and then you start all over. And, that is the goal...to [continually] work on getting there. The ups and the downs is an

inevitable aspect of life. It's a struggle and an ongoing process, and the goal is, with G-d's help, to keep struggling.

Because there is a commonly known belief that nobody is given a challenge that cannot be overcome, people make a fundamental mistake in their attitude toward overcoming their *nisyonot*. They wrongly assume that passing a *nisayon* requires a score of 100%. But 100% is not a passing grade; it's a PERFECT grade. A passing score is 65%... How that affects our spiritual challenges is not certain, but passing a *nisayon* does not mean attaining perfection! It doesn't mean never feeling angry, bitter, overwhelmed, or like crawling into bed and staying there forever...

This fact is an unbelievably liberating idea, because to be perfect is very overwhelming; I don't have that kind of energy level. The bottom line is nobody can be perfect. Except Hashem, and none of us are He...

A *nisayon* is not [merely] a test; it is life itself. If we ask not to have *nisyonot*, we are in fact asking not to be alive. The mere act of living is a *nisayon*. What is a *nisayon*? A *nisayon* is the opportunity presented to us, to actualize our potential. We all came into this world with tremendous potential, to be wonderful, kind, compassionate, forgiving, accepting. This exists within each of us in "potential." But that is not a productive way for us to exist. After 120 years, Hashem will say, "Tell me something about yourself," and a person may say, "Well, potentially, I was very patient." And Hashem will say, "Tell me when you [actually] displayed patience." And your response could be, "Well it never actually happened, but I know it was there in potential!" That is not going to get us very far... He doesn't want us to spend our lives in "potential." Hashem wants us to actualize our potential in this world.

Our *nisyonot* are given to us by Hashem for the same purpose. Our *nisyonot* are not given to us [merely] to test us, not to make life difficult, to prove that Hashem is the Boss, and we are just helpless victims. [Rather we are tested] because He loves us so much, and He wants us to experience the ultimate joy we are capable of experiencing for the rest of eternity. That is why He is sending us *nisyonot*...

Hashem wants to bring out our potential, so that after 120 years, when He watches the video of our lives, all those magnificent *middot* will be on the screen...

We do not live in a spiritual vacuum. Every single one of us is part of the whole of *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish People). Every single one of us, through our actions, is impacting the entire world, although we may be within the four walls of our house, with not another human being around. Every time we do anything in *avodat Hashem* — in the service of our Creator, it saturates the entire world with *kedusha*... *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) say — "*L'fum tz'ara agra* — according to the effort is the benefit." For people who are living with ongoing challenges, where making it through every single day can be an overwhelming job, every act of *avodat Hashem* is a zillion times greater. Therefore, we are saturating the world with significantly more *kedusha* and greatness than the average person, for whom every day is not such an ongoing challenge...

Our ultimate goal is not that we win every battle — the ultimate goal is that we win the war...that when we leave this world after 120 years we can hold our heads high, and we will be able to say, "Hashem, I gave this battle the best of my best... I kept on struggling and I kept on picking myself up"... That is what He wants from us; not perfection, but the willingness to invest in the struggle. Hashem should give us the *siyata d'Shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) to view our *nisyonot* as the gifts that they are; not to be broken by them, but to grow from them. May we merit elevation to that plane. (Excerpted from a speech at a *Yedei Chesed* Mothers Support Group)

Conclusion

While the classical sources tell us very clearly that we never get a test we can't pass, a central question with *nisyonot* (tests) is — **What does it actually mean to pass a test?**

Rav Dessler (*Michtav M'Elieyahu* 1:114) speaks about the *nekudat habechira* — the exact point where one's free will is most relevant. He wrote:

Everyone has free choice at his *nekudat habechira* (exact point of free will), but the position of the *nekudat habechira* itself is determined by various factors. It may be affected by one's previous choices which either raised or lowered his *nekudat habechira*. Or it may be affected by factors

outside of his control. [And] *Hashgacha Pratit* (Divine Supervision) may have placed him from childhood in a certain environment, higher or lower, as the case may be.

In fact, “passing a test” may involve a separate *nekudat habechira* for every single person and every specific *nisayon*. The principle of “*onnes Rachmana patrei* — One forced by circumstances is exempt [from negative consequences]” is certainly relevant with *nisyonot*, and not only in extreme cases.

Hashem should help us to see the value in our *nisyonot*, to understand what they are demanding of us, and to succeed in passing them to the very best of our ability.

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