

Yefashpeish b'Ma'asav (Responding to Difficulties & Challenges) — Part 1

We all know that *yissurim* (difficulties and challenges) are a part of life. What we may not realize, however, is that they are a **necessary** part of life. In fact, the *Gemara Arachin* (16b) says that if forty days would go by without one having any *yissurim* at all, it would be considered a terrible tragedy — as if he had been abandoned, G-d forbid. We are used to thinking about *yissurim* mostly in terms of their perceived justice or injustice, as in the classical theological and philosophical question — “Why do bad things happen to good people?” As important as that question is to ask and try to understand, there is another question which may be just as important, or perhaps even more important, to ask — “What is the proper way for us to respond to the *yissurim* in our lives?”

How should we respond to *yissurim*?

The **Gemara Brachot** (5a) presents a sequence of three different responses to *yissurim*: If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him, **[first]** *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (he should examine his actions)...

[If he] examined [his actions] but didn't find [a cause of the *yissurim*], he should assume it was because of *bitul Torah* (neglect of Torah learning — i.e., not having worked hard enough to grow) ... And if he thought [that it might be because of *bitul Torah*] but [also] didn't find [the cause], then they must be *yissurim shel ahavah* (afflictions of love).

The **Maharsha** (*Brachot* 5a) asks an obvious question on this sequence:

How would it be possible for anyone to examine his actions and not find that he had done anything wrong? After all, there is an explicit verse which tells us — “There is no *tzadik* (righteous person) in the world who does only good and never transgresses” (*Kohelet* 7:20).

Rashi (*Brachot* 5a) explains that “examining but not finding” is referring to an *aveirah* (transgression) for which these *yissurim* would be a fitting outcome. While no one can say they found no *aveirot* (transgressions) at all, it may simply be that they found none that seemed likely to have brought about these particular *yissurim*.

The **Gemara Brachot** (5a) speaks about a sequence of *yissurim* leading to *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (examining one's actions), and then doing *teshuva* (spiritual return). The *Gemara* did not say that the *yissurim* should cause one to go straight to *teshuva*.

The **Mabit** (*Beit Elokim*) explains:

This is because one needs to know and to recognize that these *yissurim* came upon him properly and appropriately as a result of the *aveirot* which corresponded to them.

Often, our first thought is to complain when difficulties befall us, as opposed to thinking what we ourselves may have done to cause them.

It is, therefore, appropriate for us to examine our ways and to search for which *aveirot* could have brought about this difficulty. We know that, in general, we have *aveirot*, and this is something we can't evade. After all, as the *possuk* (verse) tells us — “There is no *tzadik* in the world who does only good and never transgresses” (*Kohelet* 7:20). We don't need any investigation or examination for that! Therefore, it seems that the examination is needed to identify which specific *aveirah* brought about these *yissurim*. Once one knows this, he will then be able to do *teshuva* for this particular *aveirah*, since the *teshuva* varies according to the *aveirah*.

The **Iyun Yaakov** (*Brachot* 5a) cautions that one should not relate to physical *yissurim* as chance occurrences, and simply go right away to a doctor for a physical cure. Rather, one should first examine his actions, and also learn *mussar* (ethical teachings). Just as a doctor needs to search out the origin of illnesses, similarly with spiritual health, one must examine his actions [to see]

which *aveirot* [caused] these *yissurim* to come upon him. He will then be able to do a *teshuva* which addresses these specific things, which is really the essence of a spiritual cure.

The **Gemara Brachot** continues (5b) with a story of Rav Huna who had 400 barrels of wine which turned into vinegar. The Rabbis who came to visit him told him to examine his actions. He asked them, “Am I really suspect in your eyes to have done something that could have caused this financial loss?” They replied, “Is G-d suspect in **your** eyes to have given you a judgment that you didn't deserve?” He then asked them if any of his behavior seemed to be suspicious. They pointed out that he had recently withheld giving something to a person who had once stolen from him. Even though that person had been a thief, Rav Huna accepted upon himself to give this thief the full amount he had withheld until now. And once Rav Huna committed to do that, he recovered the full amount which he had lost when the wine had soured.

The **Gemara Eiruv** 13b-14b says that for two and a half years *Beit Shammai* argued with *Beit Hillel* about whether it would have been better for mankind to have been created or not. They concluded that it really would have been better for mankind **not** to have been created, but now that people **have** been created — *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (we should **examine** our deeds). And some say — *yemashmeish b'ma'asav* (we should **probe** our deeds).

The **Da'at Chachmah u'Mussar** (#22) explains that the central issue in this debate was the great danger of physicality, which can destroy the value of any action it becomes mixed into, even that of a mitzvah. The Rabbis, therefore, concluded that — “It would have been better for mankind **not** to have been created” — because they realized it would be virtually impossible for our actions to always be completely pure, without any trace of physicality. Once we **were** created, however, what is **now** our main task? “*Yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (to examine our actions)” — to refine and to purify all of our actions as much as we can.

The **Sefer Kol Bo** (#118 — *Din Ma'aseh Torah*) tells us:

Three times every day a proclamation [from Heaven] goes out and says — While it really would have been better for mankind **not** to have been created [because of their potential to cause damage in the world], now that they **have** been created, *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (they need to examine their deeds).

Yefashpeish (we should **examine** our deeds) is relevant to the **past**, since that is how we are supposed to respond to *yissurim* that **have** come upon us.

We should examine the actions which we **already** did and do *teshuva* for our transgressions. (Ritvah and Rashi — **Eiruv** 13b, **Ma'or v'Shemesh** — **Vayishlach**)

Yemashmeish (we should **probe** our deeds), however, is relevant to the **future** — from this point forward, to try to be careful and precise with all of our actions. And we should remain **continually** aware of them, as it says — “A person is obligated to **constantly** check (*yimashmeish*) his *tefillin*,” and — “A person is obligated to check (*yemashmeish*) his garments **every** *erev Shabbat*.”

We should examine the actions which we are **currently** doing and consider the long-term benefits and losses. (Ritvah and Rashi – **Eiruv** 13b, **Ma'or v'Shemesh** – **Vayishlach**)

Some explain that “*yefashpeish b'ma'asav*” means to examine our transgressions, while “*yemashmeish b'ma'asav*” means to examine even our *mitzvot*, and then to eliminate any negative aspects to make them more pure. (**Eitz Yosef** — **Eiruv** 13b)

The **Kedushat Levi** (V'etchanan) explains the *Gemara Eruvin* in light of the *Kabalah* (mystical teachings):

“It would really be better **not** to have been created than created — i.e., not to have needed to come back as a *gilgul* (reincarnation). But now that we **have** been created [i.e., come back as a

gilgul], *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*, so our actions will be repaired and we will not need to come back again as [another] *gilgul*.

There are many different meanings and benefits to *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*

The process of *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* for *yissurim* should be through *middah k'neged middah* (measure for measure). This will not merely repair the past, it will also be able to enhance the future, so that we will not return to our foolishness or continue with our flawed path. (***Kom'miyut l'Artzeinu — Ma'amar #18***)

Rav Simcha Zissel of Kelm (*Ma'amar # 45*) says:

It is known that the early doctors used their experience to understand the nature of disease. Through this awareness, they understood how to protect people from illness, and how to treat people once they became sick... From this we can understand the importance of knowing the processes of spiritual afflictions as well... Therefore, the ***Gemara Brachot*** (5a) tells us — “If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him — *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*”... There is, therefore, an obligation to [try to] understand these matters through *middah k'neged middah*, although it is an extremely difficult task.

The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot* (4:13) says:

“*Teshuva u'ma'asim tovim* (good deeds) are like a shield against difficulties” — Just like a shield requires awareness for it to be placed properly against the incoming arrows, and if not, it won't be able to protect, similarly *teshuva* requires “*yefashpeish b'ma'asav*” — that one examine their deeds and then repair whatever is crooked. (***Ahavah B'Ta'anugim***)

Yefashpeish b'ma'asav is the actual **purpose** of the *yissurim*. G-d established the system of *middah k'neged middah* (measure for measure) so that if a person strays from the true path, he will receive *yissurim* that correspond, and will then be able to find his error. We see this in the story with Rav Huna whose wine became vinegar. (***Chachmah u'Mussar #79 and 222***)

In contrast to the ***Gemara Brachot*** (5a), which speaks about *yissurim* leading to *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (i.e., seeing what we **did** wrong), the ***Zohar*** (2:167) says that the purpose of *yissurim* is not only to remind us to examine our deeds, but also to identify our internal flaws, in order to then be able to serve Hashem properly. The ***Zohar*** outlined the two basic choices every person faces — the “path of life,” and its opposite. The identifying feature of what it called the “path of life” is that it contains *tochachat mussar* — guidelines for self-improvement. When Hashem wants to guard this path of life, He establishes these rebukes and makes *tochachat mussar* for the people of the world.

The ***Arvei Nachal*** refers to this explanation of the ***Zohar*** (2:167), as opposed to the simple understanding of the ***Gemara Brachot*** (5a) alone. While the *Gemara* viewed **transgressions** as the primary cause of the *yissurim*, the *Zohar* understood that *yissurim* should awaken us to the proper path in life through identifying our negative traits.

Every person has aspects of perfection and areas where he is lacking. Our essential work is to address what we are lacking. These lacks will only be considered failings, however, if we don't attempt to rectify them. If we **do** strive to correct them, they will end up being viewed as our essential work in life. Part of this work is not merely to strengthen ourselves in our areas of weakness, but even to use these very weaknesses to complete ourselves. The *Chovot HaLevavot* (*Avodat HaElokim*, chapter 10) writes that no negative traits were created in vain...we should even try to use them to serve Hashem.

The ***Tur*** (#204) explains that the main purpose of *aveilut* (mourning) is to be *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*, and to [then] return in *teshuva*. (***Yabiah Omer #7 — Yoreh Deah #29***)

Torah wants us to view *yissurim* positively and with justice

The **Meiri** writes:

Among the foundations of our religion is for a person to contemplate and to recognize that everything which occurs to him, with all types of difficulty, is proper and with justice. As the Rabbis (*Chulin* 7b) teach — “No person even stubs his toe below unless it was decreed upon him from Above.” This will then lead him to examine his deeds, and to return from his bad path... Whether in one's possessions or with people, one should always suspect himself more than suspecting the justice of Hashem. (***Chulin* 7b, *Brachot* 5a**)

The **Sefer HaChinuch** (Mitzvah #169) adds, when discussing the *tumah* of the *metzora*: Since we need to establish in our souls that Hashem supervises every single person, and that His eyes are watching all of our ways, we are warned to pay attention to every illness and to realize that a transgression caused it. And this will lead us to be *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*.

The **Torat Avraham** writes that, in place of *nevuah* (prophecy) today, Hashem has given us *yissurim*:

Yissurim are not a punishment for *aveirot* of the past, but rather teachings and guidance to avoid [more] transgressions in the future. As the **Gemara Brachot** (5a) says — “If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him — *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*.” And according to how sensitive we are to the *yissurim*, the greater will be the revelation of the personal “*nevuah*” that they give us.

The method of our investigation will be, as our Sages have explained, through the approach of *middah k'neged middah* (measure for measure), to find the *aveirah* that would logically have caused these *yissurim* to come upon us. When Hashem sends *yissurim* to wake us up to *teshuva*, a person is able to realize what the issue is by analyzing the type of *yissurim* that he is dealing with. Similarly, Rav Chaim of Volozhin explained in *Ruach Chaim* (on *Pirkei Avot* 4:11) — “*Teshuva* and good deeds are a shield against difficulties” — Just like a shield protects only when it is held in front of the specific limb which the arrow is targeting, *teshuva* is exactly the same way. If *yissurim* are coming to a person on a specific limb, one needs to improve the actions associated with that specific part of the body. *Teshuva* will help to remove *yissurim* only if one is successful in fixing whatever was wrong with that part of the body which the *yissurim* were poised to hit.

Even mild *yissurim* can help to rectify our transgressions

The **Madregat HaAdam** (*u'Bacharta b'Chaim* — chapter 1,2) points out:

The degree of *yissurim* that people need will often be unclear to them. How can they know what level of *yissurim* are necessary to rectify a particular *aveirah*? [In fact,] even a slight inconvenience or something that could easily be ignored could be considered as *yissurim* that will be able to rectify *aveirot*. While people often forget the small difficulties because of the big ones, they are all considered and calculated by G-d.

Just like small *yissurim* which are ignored by most people are still called *yissurim*, and are able to rectify *aveirot* — bigger *yissurim*, which great people may even view positively, will also be called *yissurim*, and will also be able to rectify their *aveirot*. These great people should certainly not lose the cleansing power of their *yissurim* simply because their elevation allowed them to view these *yissurim* positively.

After all, what made the *yissurim* easier for them to accept was not that they were not painful for them, but rather that they were capable of dealing with this pain. They will, therefore, not only gain from the cleansing of the *yissurim*, they will also end up even more elevated from this ability to accept their *yissurim* properly. Just like G-d decrees the *yissurim* which are given to people, He also gives every person the choice of how they will deal with the *yissurim* which they have been given...*yissurim* come upon us not only to cleanse us from our *aveirot*, but also to elevate us. Only one who strengthens himself in the face of *yissurim* will achieve both benefits. One who

does not strengthen himself will not be elevated by *yissurim*, but he will still gain from the rectification of his *aveirot*.

Rav Avigdor Miller explains:

Yissurim bring a person to recognize the Creator of the world, which is a merit for him. Along with this being a great merit, it can also be a difficult test. There are, however, minor *yissurim* which are [also] relevant to each and every one of us. [In fact,] one who goes 40 days without even minor *yissurim* is considered to have “acquired this temporal world” (*Gemara Arachin* 16b) [and thereby lost any connection to the eternal world to come.] There is no greater tragedy than this! Day by day [with no *yissurim* at all to wake him up] the barriers which separate him from his Creator will grow stronger and stronger. Therefore, the Rabbis have come and given us great and beneficial advice. Even minor things that commonly occur to people every day are also called “*yissurim*.” We simply need to pay attention to them and to accept them as “*yissurim*.”

Whoever does this will gain two benefits from these *yissurim*:

First, is the recognition that there is a Creator of the world that is guiding His world, and He is the One bringing the *yissurim* on him.

Secondly, by seeing that *yissurim* have come upon him, he will then *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*.

If we use the small things that occur to us, like the examples the Rabbis give us [in *Gemara Arachin* 16b], and we then attain the benefit from these occurrences, we may thereby be able to avoid more difficult *yissurim*. There will be no **need** to bring them upon us since we will have already learned and acquired *yirat Shamayim* (fear or awe of Heaven) from these small things.
(**Torat Avigdor**)

In the desert, Hashem both afflicted the Jews and healed them, He withheld food from them while sending them the manna. We need to realize that when Hashem sends *yissurim*, it is not to take revenge, but rather for our own good, because of the love which He has for us. He wants to return us to the good so we will then go in the good path.

Thus Hashem says to the Jewish people — “Don’t think that I am relating to you like slaves. If a person sees that his slave is not behaving as he would like, he tries to sell him. Rather, I am bringing *yissurim* upon you in order to get you to do *teshuva*, since I swore that I would **never** abandon you.” Therefore, the *Gemara* teaches — “If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him — *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*.” Perhaps he did an *aveirah* that caused these *yissurim*, and he should try to do *teshuva*, so that the *yissurim* will cleanse him of the *aveirah*... While *yissurim* may be bad for the body, they are good for the *neshama* (soul)...

And just like a parent doesn’t afflict a child [fully in] accordance with what the child did, but rather somewhat less than what is deserved, similarly Hashem afflicts us in *Olam Ha’zeh* (this world), and not [fully in] accordance with what we did [which would be given in *Olam Haba* (the world to come)]... Any pain which a person endures in this world can be considered to be *yissurim*, even very minor pain; they are all able to minimize his *aveirot*, so he can then inherit *Olam Haba*.

(**Yalkut Me’am Lo’ez — Devarim 8:5**)

***Yefashpeish b'Ma'asav* means to make thinking and learning a fixed and consistent part of our lives**

Learning Torah

The **second** response of the *Gemara Brachot* (5a) is that, if one did not find an *aveirah* which fit, the *yissurim* were caused by *bitul Torah* (neglect of Torah learning).

Rashi (plus the Eitz Yosef — Eiruvim 13b) explains that this is because *yissurim* should **bring** a person to *Talmud Torah* (learning of Torah).

The difference between the illnesses of the body and the illnesses of the soul is that with physical illnesses, the success of the cure does not require the sick person to understand his sickness. Even if he doesn't understand it at all, the doctor can still heal him. This is the opposite with spiritual ailments, the very source of which is the person's lack of awareness of his evil. [In fact,] every [spiritual] problem is essentially a mistaken path which seems proper in one's eyes. (*K'neset Yisrael — Ohel Yaakov on Tehillim 32:3*)

Learning Mussar

If one doesn't learn *mussar* (life lessons) for himself from all situations, the Rabbis call him a “*rasha*” (evil person). Even if he is presently a *tzadik* (righteous individual) and *gadol hador* (the greatest of the generation) who has not yet transgressed, he still needs to take *mussar* for himself... All the more so, one who has not yet reached a high level before transgressing certainly needs to take *mussar* from every situation. (*M'vakshei HaShlamot — Shelach*)

Rav Aaron Kotler (*Mishnat Rebbe Aharon — Elul — Chovat HaHitbon'nut v'Limud HaMussar*) writes:

The essence of *mussar* is to afflict oneself, as it says (*Gemara Brachot 7a*) — “One aspect of self-discipline in one's heart is better than 100 lashes.” The *Gra* explains in a letter — “One must constantly afflict oneself, but **not** with fasts or physical afflictions, rather with restraining one's mouth and one's desires, and the like.” *Mussar* should be **in place of yissurim** since it will make us regret...our confusions.

Thinking and Introspecting

Rav Simcha Zissel of Kelm says:

The *yissurim* which G-d brings upon us, as well as those of the world, are all for the good — to awaken us to improve. This is **only** true, however, when we examine our actions in terms of *middah k'neged middah*. We will then gain in two different ways — we will be cleansed [in terms of the past], and we will be inspired for the future.

But if, G-d forbid, one doesn't do *teshuva*, then his culpability will grow, and cause *yissurim* to come upon him in which he will **not** be able to examine his actions through *middah k'neged middah* — since the *yissurim* hadn't helped him [until now] to rectify his *aveirot*.

This was the meaning of Hashem hardening the heart of Pharaoh — in other words, his punishment was that he didn't have *middah k'neged middah* revealed to him... Therefore, it is an obligation for us to strengthen our **mitzvah to think**. (*Ma'amar # 282*)

In a letter to a student of his, **Rav Simcha Zissel** writes:

My heart is pained over the *yissurim* that you are dealing with. May you not need to suffer any more. I am happy, however, that you have asked what could be the cause, as the **Gemara Brachot** (5a) says — “If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him — *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*.” And this should cause you to have good health all the days of your life. How wonderful it would be if you remembered this always, and you would do *teshuva* your entire life. As I saw from an elder — “What hope is there for a person if he doesn't do more tomorrow than he did yesterday.”

When I saw this, I thought — Who will be able to attain a great level like this? However, we see with children that there is no day in which they haven't grown more than the previous day. Even if we can't always see this with our eyes as it is happening, we know that it must be true, since we see over the course of time that they have grown. And the growth of the body is only until about age twenty, but the *seichel* (intellect) continues growing as long as we keep using it. However, one who doesn't utilize his *seichel* and grow through it every single day, ultimately destroys it. (*Ma'amar # 408*)

The *sefer Da'at Chachmah u'Mussar* (#9,10) explains:

Based on the Ramban, we see that even the loftiest ideas can be attained from **within** ourselves. We even find this in the *Gemara Brachot* (5a) — “If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him — *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*.” While we might have thought that this clarity of our actions could be acquired only through Torah, we see that it can also be attained simply through thinking. The brothers of Yosef, for example, gained clarity of *hashgacha pratit* (Divine personal supervision) through examining their actions in the midst of their *yissurim*. Even Pharaoh, who was afflicted with boils after taking Sara captive, realized that Sara must have been Avraham's wife. He came to this realization after self-examination, which was prompted by *yissurim*. [Therefore, we see, that thinking and *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* (self-examination) resulting from *yissurim* can themselves lead us to a very great degree of clarity.]

The *Migdanot Eliezer (Toldot)* writes:

When *yissurim* befall a *tzadik*, he will be certain that Hashem is righteous. He will, therefore, accept the *din* (judgment) upon himself, since he knows that nothing is random. At the same time he will not fall into depression, but rather will control himself and straighten whatever had been twisted. Evil people [may] **also** not worry about their transgressions or fall into depression. To an onlooker, they may appear to be having the same reaction. There will, however, be an enormous distinction between the two of them. The *tzadik* knows that he transgressed, but in order to maintain his service of Hashem, he forces himself to continue serving Hashem with *simcha*. The *rasha*, however, doesn't think about his *aveirot* because they don't matter to him. He doesn't even see himself as having transgressed, since he feels that whatever he did was permissible.

The proof of this is that when *yissurim* come upon them, the *tzadik* is *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*, while the *rasha* views it all as randomness, never imagining it as the result of his *aveirot*. Therefore, *middah k'neged middah*, G-d then makes the *yissurim* look random [to the *rasha*], thus making it very difficult for him to be able to do *teshuva*.

Rabeinu Bachya (*Kad HaKemach* — *Eivel* #3), in his explanation of *aveilut* (mourning), explains: It is fitting to be *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*...and to contemplate the day of death. One who doesn't consider the day of death is likened by the verse to an animal that is destined for *shechita* (slaughter). The end of man is death, and the end of an animal is *shechita*, but the animal doesn't feel the day of his death until the time when it is brought to be slaughtered. Similarly, there are people who, like animals, don't think at all about the day of death until they actually arrive there.

Cheshbon HaNefesh (Spiritual Accounting)

The *Mesillat Yesharim* (chap. 2,3) writes about the critical importance of a regular *cheshbon hanefesh* (spiritual accounting or examination):

Chapter 2:

Zrizut (vigilance) relates to a person's actions and matters. He must contemplate and survey his actions and his conduct, to see whether or not they are good...

And he must not go [through life] haphazardly, as a blind person walks in darkness.

This is certainly something that our logic demands. Could it be that a person with knowledge and understanding to save himself...should want to close his eyes to his own salvation? Nothing is as base and as foolish as this. One who does this is lower than the animals and the creatures that naturally protect themselves, fleeing and escaping from what they see could harm them. One who walks without thinking whether his path is good is like a blind man walking along a riverbank. He is in great danger.

The prophet Yirmeyahu [characterized people doing this] — “... like a horse charging straight into battle.” In other words, they were racing forward impulsively with no time to evaluate their conduct. They, therefore, fell into evil without any real awareness...

This is one of the main strategies of the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), which constantly works to burden people's hearts until they are left with no time either to think or to observe their path. It knows that if they would pay attention only minimally to their ways, they would immediately begin to regret their deeds, and would eventually abandon transgressions entirely.

If one oversees himself, G-d will help him to be saved from the *yetzer hara*. But if he does not, then G-d will certainly not watch over him. For if one is not compassionate [toward himself], who else will show him compassion?

Chapter 3:

One who wishes to oversee his conduct...must consider what constitutes the true good which a person should choose, and the true evil from which he should flee.

The Rabbis referred to this when they said (*Eruvin* 13b): "It would really have been better for mankind **not** to have been created...but now that he has **been** created, he should *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* — **examine** his deeds, while others say *yemashmeish b'ma'asav* — he should **probe or feel** his deeds."

Yefashpeish (**examination**) of one's deeds means to investigate one's actions to determine whether there are any actions among them that should **not** be done.

Yemashmeish (**probing or feeling**), however, means to investigate even one's **good** deeds; perhaps they contain some — even partly — negative aspect which one must eliminate. This is like feeling a garment to see if it is good and strong, or weak and frayed. Similarly, one must examine his deeds thoroughly to determine their nature, until he becomes pure.

It is also necessary that one be careful in his ways and evaluate them daily, like the merchants do to prevent their businesses from falling into ruin. One should make fixed times for this, rather than doing it haphazardly, and stick with these times, because the results are so great.

The Rabbis explicitly taught us the need for a *cheshbon hanefesh* — "to calculate the loss of a mitzvah versus its gain, and the gain of a transgression versus its loss..." (*Pirkei Avot* 2:1). They have already experienced this and seen that **this alone is the true way** for man to attain the goodness that he seeks.

The **Chovot HaLevavot** also discusses the importance of *cheshbon hanefesh* (this spiritual accounting):

Cheshbon hanefesh is one's effort in terms of both Torah and worldly issues to understand which of his obligations he has already fulfilled, and what he still needs to do. (**Chap. 1**)

This effort with both Torah and worldly issues will differ in terms of one's perception, intelligence, and clarity of understanding. Every single person is obligated to calculate what he is required to do to serve his Creator, according to his recognition of the good of his Creator — both in general and for him specifically. (**Chap. 2**)

The benefit of this calculation will directly impact the soul... As a result of this, one will acquire all virtues and attain all precious qualities. (**Chap. 4**)

One is obligated to do this *cheshbon* constantly, according to his intellectual ability and his degree of recognition, at all times, and with every single breath he takes. (**Chap. 5**)

Based on the responsa of the **Mareh Yechezkiel** (104 – #151 "*HaGadol MiMinsk*") we see: When the Rabbis tell us that the proper response to *yissurim* or any type of difficulty is to be *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*, this means that we need to study works like the *Chovot HaLevavot* on *cheshbon hanefesh*, even when it is neither [the month of] Elul nor the ten days of *teshuva*. There

is no greater examination of one's deeds than studying works like this, which dissect the various confusions of people down to their fine details. When we come to an example in which we had stumbled previously, we will then remember and be on our guard. Our intention with this should not merely be to understand proper behaviors and to learn lofty ideas and then analyze them like we do with our other learning, but rather to understand the simple meaning of the words, and to really incorporate them into our lives.

The **Sefer Kol Bo** (#67 — *Din Seder Darchei HaTeshuva*) presents a very demanding *cheshbon hanefesh* regimen to maintain vigilance in one's life:

To guard yourself from **all** transgressions, when you first get up in the morning, think lofty thoughts, *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*, and try not to deviate at all until breakfast. If you **did** deviate in any way before breakfast, you should recite *viduy* (verbalize to G-d) over it immediately, to distance yourself from any further transgressions. If some other transgression then presents itself before you, distance yourself from it by saying — “How could I do this great evil, to recite *viduy* over something, and then return to do it again?”

If, when you got to breakfast, you were *yefashpeish* and didn't find anything wrong, you should thank and praise your Creator for helping you merit to do *teshuva shleima* (complete *teshuva*). And just like you made it from the morning until now [without transgressing], you should also work to guard yourself from now until dinner time.

Before you eat dinner, you should repeat this process, and similarly from dinner time until you go to sleep. You should repeat this process — of these three daily time periods — every single day, for a month or a year, until you have established and strengthened the service of your Creator, and abandoned all evil deeds... You should then feel secure and no longer afraid since you will be helped from Heaven. And your past transgressions will now be considered like merits.

The **Hanhagat Tzadikim** teaches that we need to remember, every single night:

This world is not where we really live, since the way of the world is that we will eventually die. In addition, we should be concerned that we may die suddenly. Therefore, every night we should *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* in terms of what we did today, and really pay attention to what occurred.

The **Shelah HaKadosh** writes that, as part of the regular preparations for Shabbat, one should *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* and do *teshuva* to fix whatever needs repair. Only then should one cut his nails and go to immerse in a *mikvah*, like a woman who is purifying herself, since there is no *tumah* (spiritual lacking) like the *tumah* of *aveirot*.

Yefashpeish b'Ma'asav (Recognizing our Greatness and Purpose) — Part 2

While *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* is essential in response to *yissurim*, there is a great danger if this is done in isolation. This could easily lead us to simply denigrate ourselves, become depressed, and give up on trying to improve. Therefore, before we begin examining our actions, we must know that the first step in all personal growth is understanding ourselves and recognizing our own greatness.

Rav Wolbe discussed this in the *Alei Shur* (*Ma'aracha Shniya — Da'at K'tzot Drachav*):

(*Hakdama*) — **Understanding ourselves compels us to fix ourselves.** Every single person has a particular path to travel in life. [Our ability to understand this is related to] three different stages in history:

Initially, the *nevi'im* (prophets) clarified everyone's individual service, according to each person's spiritual essence.

Afterwards, people established their own particular style of service with the *ruach hakodesh* (Divine Inspiration) that they had inside of themselves. This was risky, however, because their

biases could cause them to end up directing all of their actions exclusively toward the fulfillment of their desires, while thinking that they were really Divinely inspired.

During the **third period**, which is our present generation, we don't even attempt to establish a personal mode of service for ourselves. Our aspiration is simply that our actions should [generally] fulfill G-d's will. However, even in our generation, people are still obligated to have a specific mode of service, and one wishing to grow must not be satisfied whatsoever with merely a generic fulfillment of *mitzvot*. Therefore, it is very praiseworthy for us to clarify and to improve ourselves with our own specific traits and behaviors, as personally as possible.

In terms of practical efforts, the tradition we have from Rav Yisrael Salanter, is to particularly focus on the small matters which people usually ignore.

Chapter 1 — Every person needs to know that he is significant. The *Mishnah* (*Sanhedrin* 4:5) tells us:

Everyone is obligated to say — “*bishvili nivra ha'olam* — The world was created for me.” Rashi adds — That is to say — “I am as significant as an entire world. Therefore, I had better not remove myself from this world with even a single transgression!”

“I am like an entire world” — This is the special nature of man — there was never another individual like him, and there will never be another one until the end of all the generations.

With my distinct blend of abilities, my particular parents, my having been born into this exact time period and this specific environment, there is certainly a [unique] personal service incumbent upon me, and a particular portion [which I have] in Torah. Furthermore, the entire creation is waiting for me to do it, since no one else in the world can possibly fulfill my particular task.

Without an appreciation of one's importance, one cannot accomplish anything in Torah. Therefore, the prerequisite for the giving of the Torah was:

“You (the Jewish people) should be a *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh* — a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation.”

And, then, following the giving of the Torah, Moshe told the Jewish people:
“Don't be afraid. It was in order to raise you up that Hashem came to you.”

Hashem gave *nevuah* (prophecy) to every single Jew to make them all great and exalted. Both the beginning and the end of the giving of the Torah was the elevation of each individual member of the Jewish people. Otherwise, they would have been too small to have appreciated the intentions of the Torah.

A person working on himself certainly needs to focus on his spiritual failings. [Therefore,] one who regularly learns *mussar* is constantly confronted with negative character traits and orientations. “*Sur mei'rah* — turn from the bad” seems to be the initial and primary directive in all of our internal work. Therefore, we think that the entire aspiration of learning *mussar* is to uncover and denigrate these negative [aspects of ourselves]. This is actually only half of the truth.

The beginning of all of our personal work is to feel the elevation of man. If one has never experienced the inherent greatness of a human being, and his work with himself is only to magnify his knowledge of his negatives, and to afflict himself for this, he will eventually just give up. And, in the end, he will fully accept this negative [perspective], due to his loss of hope in improving himself.

The *Chovot Halevavot* (Duties of the Heart — Chapter 2), in his introduction to the topic of humility, should be the foundation for all of our work on ourselves:

There is an aspect of humility which is common to both people and lower animals. It is a poverty (lowliness) of the spirit. This sort of humility is found among the foolish and ignorant people who

are unable to understand the soul and its [tremendous] value. While this is widely considered to be humility, in truth it is simply spiritual poverty and blindness, brought about by a stupidity which overpowers the soul and prevents it from seeing what is best for it.

Humility is really the trait which comes after the soul has [already] been lifted and elevated above the lower qualities which it shares with the animals, due to its superior wisdom, its spiritual nobility, and its clarity of what is elevated and what is lowly. [Only] when humility and lowliness have been built upon [this loftiness of the soul], are they then praiseworthy qualities. Otherwise, they should not even be considered positive traits, but rather among the despicable qualities, for they then [simply lower the soul to the] level of the animals.

[Rav Wolbe then continued —] These words which describe humility guide us on the path in every aspect of our work on ourselves. A person who doesn't recognize the preciousness of his soul is **forbidden** to investigate his faults, nor should he afflict himself because of them.

Rav Yerucham used to say:

Woe to the person who doesn't recognize his spiritual faults, because he doesn't know what to repair, but oy *va'vay* (even more pity) to the one who doesn't recognize his spiritual **strengths**, because then he is ignorant of the tools which will allow him to work on himself in any way.

Of course, the purpose of learning *mussar* is “*sur mei'rah* — turn from the bad.” But even before we can come to this, we must learn “positive *mussar*.” Our learning of *mussar* will awaken an appreciation of the lofty stature of man, an appreciation which will actually **require** us to live an elevated life. Through sitting down and learning even a half-hour of this *mussar* with an excitement and enthusiasm that — “Every single person is obligated to say, “*bishvili nivra ha'olam* — The world was created for me!” one will be transformed. From a very limited perspective of oneself, where one feels of little value, as if no one knows or cares about us, we will grow right away by seeing ourselves as lofty and elevated above all of the animals and their lowly qualities.

It is important for us to realize that we can learn this loftiness of the soul throughout all of the *mussar* works. As one example among many, see how this elevation of man is expressed specifically within the concept of regret of the ***Sha'arei Teshuva*** (1:10): One must understand in his heart that his having left G-d was evil and bitter... He must regret his negative deeds and ask himself — “What have I done? How was there no fear of G-d in front of me?... [And then the *Sha'arei Teshuva* points out —] Even worse than this, I have been cruel to my precious soul and made it impure through my lowly, negative inclinations. What are all its accomplishments worth if it (my soul) is evil in the sight of its Master? How could I have exchanged an eternal world for a temporal one? What have I become? I have become like an animal, and have followed my negative desires like a horse, and like a donkey with no intelligence, and I have erred from the path of logic. The Creator placed a living soul, wisdom, and the benefit of logic within me, to be able to recognize and fear G-d, and to remain in control of my body, just like I have been given control over all of the animals.

We see from this [section of the *Sha'arei Teshuva*] that without recognizing the “special wisdom and preciousness of the soul,” it is absolutely impossible to have regret over a transgression. There isn't a single one of us that hasn't been afflicted by their conscience about various transgressions. When we begin to learn *mussar*, our conscience is immediately aroused and reminds us of our failings. This can cause us to become depressed, and make it difficult to see the loftiness and significance within ourselves. We need to strengthen ourselves against this, otherwise our *mussar* learning will be unable to accomplish anything positive. Come and learn how precious our soul is! Only once we have clarity with regard to this, and this knowledge is not merely dry, but is a living reality within us, then we can begin to demand from ourselves to “*sur mei'rah* — turn from the bad,” as well as to have regret and abandon our transgressions.

The work of *mussar* and the battle of our desires is no simple matter. Here is how the Ramchal (*Derech Eitz Chaim*) characterized this struggle:

Here is the greatest and most powerful solution to use against the *yetzer hara*, and the strategy which will accomplish the most — Set aside at least one hour every single day, free from all other thoughts, to focus and to seek out [answers to the following questions] with the heart —

What did the early Sages, the pillars of the world, do to become so endeared to Hashem?

What did Moshe Rabeinu do, what did David, the anointed one of Hashem, do, along with all of the *gedolim* (great ones) before us?

One must then use his mind to decide that whatever is best for a person to do all the days of his life, he will do, and it will be the best for him as well. Then he should think about whether his current situation is according to the path which was chosen by these men of renown, or not.

This is positive *mussar* and it is the **first** step in learning and service of G-d. In fact, this is explicit in the *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu* (chap. 25):

One is obligated to say — When will my deeds reach the deeds of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov?

One is obligated to say this because this is the beginning and the foundation. How confused are those small-minded people who imagine that there are different opinions with this, as if there is one *beit medrash* (school of thought) which stands for “*gadlut ha'adam* — the greatness of man,” and a second which doesn't believe in this. How would it be possible to argue on the essence of the Torah?!...

Whatever one doesn't think about will be very difficult to achieve and perfect. But as soon as one does think about it, it then becomes extremely close to him. In other words, if one never considers the concept of greatness, and does not attempt to learn from the actions of the greatest people, it will be enormously difficult to arrive at that level. For one who **does** elevate himself to think about this, however, this thought alone will draw him very close to perfection.

Rav Aaron Kotler (*Mishnat Rebbe Aharon*) wrote:

Recognizing the value of man is the foundation of fixing one's actions. The Torah (*Devarim* 14:1) says:

Banim atem l'Hashem Elokeichem, lo titgod'du v'lo tasimu karcha bein eineichem l'meit
— You are children to G-d your L-rd; Don't cut your flesh and don't make a bald patch between your eyes for one who died.

When the verse writes — “*Banim atem* — [The Jewish people] are children [of G-d]” —this is not just an expression, but rather they are **actually** considered to be children, with the same connection, relationship, and value as children. This incredible level applies to every single Jew, and it impacts his overall conduct. If every Jew is required to have a nice appearance, with no gashes or bald patches, all the more so is he obligated to be far from any spiritual blemishes or lowliness.

The next verse then says:

Because you are a holy people to G-d your L-rd, and G-d chose you to be a treasured nation to Him.

In general, people don't recognize their tremendous importance, but only see their failings, since they feel closer to [these failings] as a result of their physicality and childhood habits. Therefore, they see themselves as lowly and shameful. And, as a result, they actually **do** become smaller and smaller. This is like a wealthy person who is unaware of his riches and is, therefore, unable to utilize them. He will essentially remain a poor person in all respects.

Everyone is, therefore, obligated to recognize his great significance, and the potential that he can actualize with this awareness. The more he appreciates this, the more his significance will grow.

This will ultimately be the greatest means to improve his actions. This understanding of his stature will always make him consider which actions are proper for him to do, and he will refrain from any which are not fitting for his greatness.

The essence and spiritual level of a person is a function of this recognition of his own value. [For example,] one who eats in the marketplace is disqualified from testifying in court (*Gemara Kiddushin* 40b and Rambam — *Hilchot Eidut* 11:5). Why is it that a person like this, who is unconcerned about his dignity, cannot testify? Isn't it possible that he still has *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) and will, therefore, not lie? The essence of the reliability of a witness is the feeling of — “How could I do something so lowly as to testify falsely in *beit din* (Jewish court)?” Since a lowly person will clearly cheapen himself, it is impossible to rely on him, because he could easily lie in his testimony. The principle is that the more a Jew realizes he is the son of the King and destined for greatness, the more he will guard himself and his own dignity. Even a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar) will be trusted to accurately identify a lost object as his own only if he is careful that his appearance properly expresses the honor of the Torah. If, however, he doesn't recognize his own worth, and thereby belittles himself, this will cause a great loss in all of his spiritual matters.

We are cautioned in *Pirkei Avot* (2:13) — “Don't view yourself as a *rasha* (evil person).” The greatest cause of transgression is not feeling important in one's own eyes, and [ultimately] not even being considered to be a person. Therefore, the recognition of one's intrinsic value is the greatest facilitator for him to fix his actions.

One must also recognize that his **inner** sanctity is his essence and soul, as opposed to what he receives from the outside.

It is obvious that these thoughts and lofty contemplations will not lead to arrogance at all. On the contrary, this will actually increase his feeling of humility. The more a person draws close to spirituality and matters of sanctity, the more he will nullify himself to the reality of G-d. The more he distances himself from the truth, however, the more he really **will** approach arrogance.

You (the Jewish people) should be a *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh* — a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

This was the prerequisite to the giving of the Torah, since the purpose of the Torah was to raise every Jew to an elevated sanctity, and to be a treasure to Hashem. People, however, often denigrate themselves and their spirituality. There is then no great difference [in their own eyes] if their spiritual situation is a bit better or a bit worse. Even when it looks like this person is being arrogant; the truth of the matter is that he is minimizing his value.

Our perspective is fundamentally flawed. Every Jew was created from his inception for unlimited greatness. On a physical level, we know that we are just a speck of dust within the multitude of the planets. This might cause us to think that it doesn't matter much whether we are good or bad. Therefore, the Torah spelled out at the very beginning that we are a treasure, and that we are all precious to G-d.

Netivot Shalom — Netivei Da'at — Pirkei Mevo — Mah Hashem Elokecha sho'eil me'imach?

The classical work *Yesod Ha'Avodah* wrote in the name of the Ari z"l:

No person has ever been the same as any other person from the beginning of Creation until now, and no person is able to fix what another person is able to fix.

These words establish a great foundation for the obligation of a person in his world. A person must know with complete clarity what Hashem wants from him, from him specifically, and what his particular path is to draw close to Hashem. This will be according to his *shoresh neshama* (the

root of his soul), his particular traits, and his particular time period. One who lacks clarity in terms of his particular role and aspiration in his world will be like a traveler with no idea where he is going; he will certainly never reach his destination.

This clarity needs to touch on every single aspect of his service of G-d — his tasks in life, his traits and nature, as well as his obligations under all circumstances. And this will protect him securely in all of his ways in his elevated path towards G-d.

The first step is for every person to think deeply and introspectively, in order to understand — What is my specific obligation in my world, and what is the particular reason that I came down into this world? [Ultimately our task is] to deal with our bad root and the negative that sprouts from it. A useful clue to recognize this [is to think] — What is our greatest challenge? That itself is likely to be our specific task in life.

Just like it is possible to cling to G-d in times of clarity, it is also possible to come close to Him specifically in the midst of darkness and challenges. If it is a time of darkness and *hester panim* (G-d hiding His face), that is a sign that our task at that time is to serve Hashem right in the midst of the darkness. In no other way will we be able to fulfill our particular task in that exact situation.

One needs to clearly be aware that all of the conditions and circumstances surrounding him are the only ways he will draw close to G-d and fulfill his obligation in his world. [For example,] a very wealthy person can connect to G-d through his wealth by generously giving *tzedaka* and doing *chesed*, while the task of a poor person may be to accept his difficult circumstances with love.

We see just how valuable clarity is. The *yetzer hara* (negative inclination) will work even harder to remove our *yishuv hada'at* (peace of mind) than to get us to transgress. The strategy of the *yetzer hara* is to trip us up with our desires and our *middot ra'ot* (negative traits) until we give up. That is actually his main goal. As long as a Jew has clarity, that clarity will save him from even the lowest place. Once he gives up, however, he is then entirely under the control of the *yetzer*, and he will do its bidding without any resistance. The power of a Jew is exclusively when he remains clear-minded. He will realize that even in the lowest of situations, Hashem is with him, and Hashem will never abandon him. The secret of the *emunah* of a Jew is that there is always a way back to Hashem.

Practical Guidelines for *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* in response to *yissurim*, based on Rabbi Leuchter, Rabbi David Rosenthal, and Rabbi Alexander Seinfeld:

The most painful part of the challenges we are facing may be the very reason why G-d is bringing them; since we need to grow particularly in that area. Just like when a person goes to the gym, the muscle that needs to be worked on the most is the one that hurts the most, so it is with *tzarot* (difficulties and challenges) and their impact on our souls.

Hashgacha pratit (Divine Providence) means that G-d interacts with us in the world, trying to teach us and to help us grow through the tests and experiences we go through in our lives. The problem is that, nowadays, without any prophets around, the messages are often unclear. So how **do** we read the signs?

The key question we should ask ourselves about *yissurim* is — “Where does this **really** hurt us the **most**; which of our buttons is being pressed?” That itself may actually be the main message!

Hashem knows our emotional make-up even better than we do. He knows where our faults lie and He wants us to grow and to overcome them. It is often through the pain of our flaws that Hashem speaks to us the loudest. It is His way of telling us to grow.

Similarly, our reaction to our challenges may also help us to identify their messages:

If something made me angry — maybe I need to work on my anger.

If I caught a cold and felt lousy — perhaps I should work harder to appreciate my health (e.g., saying the “*asher yatzar*” blessing better).
And someone who had become almost obsessed with some achievement, and despondent in the meantime, may have been deriving too much self-esteem from this area.

Returning to the *Gemara Arachin* (16b)

The *Gemara Arachin* (16b), which spoke about the importance of *yissurim*, at least once every 40 days, certainly shows the critical and central role that *yissurim* play in all of our lives. However, as some of the sources quoted above have explained, by emphasizing that even minor irritations and inconveniences could be considered “*yissurim*,” the *Gemara* is also giving us a tremendous tool to utilize on a daily basis.

What exactly **are** *yissurim*? The clearest source and statement about *yissurim* is the *possuk* (verse) in *Devarim* 8:5:

V'yadata im levavecha, ki ka'asher ye'yaser 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*.”

By comparing G-d to a parent, the Torah is defining and explaining that *yissurim* are difficulties and challenges given to us from G-d's **love**, for **our benefit**.

While the difficulty of major *yissurim* is often in the ability to see this love and benefit within these *yissurim*, the challenge of minor *yissurim* may simply be to see them as being *yissurim* at all; i.e., coming to us from G-d for any purpose whatsoever.

The difference between minor *yissurim* and everyday annoyances is, therefore, this very awareness that they are coming to us from G-d. While this may sound obvious, it can actually be quite difficult to put into practice. How do we make sure that the *yissurim* G-d sends to us every day don't become simply random hassles? The key is *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* — to first see the *yissurim* as coming from G-d's love, for our benefit, and then to try to examine our deeds in response to them.

This very effort to see whatever is happening to us, particularly the minor events, as being from G-d's love, for our benefit, allows them to function as *yissurim*, and thereby to bring us the many benefits that we have spoken about. And this can occur even if we never end up seeing any single clear message, and never succeed in understanding a specific *middah k'neged middah* aspect in them.

My *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rav Noach Weinberg, *zt"l*, often quoted the following idea from the *Orchos Tzadikim* (*Sha'ar Ratzon*) about the importance of really paying attention to what G-d is trying to communicate to us:

The rule of the matter is that one should not be stubborn or stiff-necked against those people who give him *tochacha* (rebuke) or try to teach him the straight path. He should want to listen to them and to accept their words with a full heart...

Rebbe Abahu [spoke similarly about the importance of paying attention to the messages from G-d] — In the future, everyone will be amazed about the person who [truly] listened to G-d. They will ask — “Who is this simple one that never [properly] learned, and yet is sitting with the *Avot* (Patriarchs) and speaking with them?!” G-d will reply to them — “Why are you so surprised? He deserves this because he [really] listened to me [throughout his life].”

At the end of the day, and particularly at the end of our lives, the single most important value that we will have for eternity, is how hard we worked to really listen to G-d and to the many different messages which He sent to us. How we responded to the different types of *yissurim* in our lives will be a big part of that.

A powerful articulation of what it means to respond properly to *yissurim* was expressed by **Rav Chaim Friedlander zt"l** (*Sifsei Chaim* — *Derech shel Aliya*), whose teachings are collected and presented in the ***Sifsei Chaim***. About 11 months before he passed away, he wrote about how to see G-d's hand within the *yissurim* in his **own** life and how to learn from them:

I need to remind myself and to feel in my heart that Hashem is calling to me through these *yissurim*. And Who is the One bringing these *yissurim* upon me? The Merciful One Whose *rachamim* (mercy) and *chesed* (kindness) are without any limit at all.

Therefore, I must use all of my ability to really listen to this voice. After all, these *yissurim* are Heavenly assistance to awaken me to a complete *teshuva* from the complacency and habituation of the *yetzer hara*... The choice is entirely within my hands to use this Heavenly assistance and to transform these *yissurim* into something extremely valuable.

And I need to remind myself that the intentions of G-d the Merciful One are exclusively for the good. We need to give thanks for the *yissurim* just like for any other Divine assistance, as the Rabbis taught (*Brachot* 60b) — “Just like we make a blessing for the good, we also make a blessing for the difficulties. And both blessings need to be made with *simcha*.” This Divine Supervision is being given to me with the same measure of *chesed* that bestows unlimited goodness upon me. And whatever cleansing of *aveirot* this accomplishes for me is tremendously beneficial, since any pain in this world is tiny compared to the huge eternal pain [that I would otherwise have] in *Olam Haba*.

The *yissurim* are bad for me only if I myself **turn** them into something bad; if I don't accept them with *simcha*, or if they don't spur me to do *teshuva*. Therefore, the first step at this time is to have a crystal clear understanding... We need to learn from the *yissurim*...and that is their purpose. Specifically at a time like this, one must maintain a constant focus on *hashgacha pratit* (personal Divine Supervision). Within the depths of one's heart, one must know that even the tiniest occurrence is from Hashem, as the Rabbis teach (*Chulin* 7b) — “No person stubs his toe below unless it has been decreed upon him from Above.” Hashem is the One Who orchestrates every single thing that happens to us.

The *yissurim* also come to wake me up from the habituation which blinds us. They teach me about the daily kindnesses of Hashem, and show me that even my bread and water should not be taken for granted.

And, therefore, the ***Gemara Brachot*** (5a) said — “If one sees *yissurim* coming upon him — *yefashpeish b'ma'asav*...” The purpose of *yissurim* is to create a new entity with new responsibilities and a new awareness which will necessitate a brand new path in one's service of G-d.

Hashem should help every one of us to see G-d's love and our benefit in all of our *yissurim*, particularly the minor irritations and inconveniences of life. And our effort to respond properly to all of them through *yefashpeish b'ma'asav* should help us to not need, *chas v'shalom* (G-d forbid), any bigger *yissurim* than these in our lives.

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