

## Understanding & Dealing with *Nisyonot* — Part 2 — 6 Purposes of *Nisyonot*

### First — *Nisyonot* Actualize Potential

The **Gemara Menachot** (53b) asks —

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

The **Siftei Chaim** (*Parshat Va'era* — *Akeidah*) explains the Ramban's commentary on the *Akeidah* to understand the concept of *nisyonot* —

The concept of a *nisayon* is that a person has complete choice with his actions; if he wants [to do something] — he will do it, and if he doesn't want to — he won't do it. It is, therefore, called a *nisayon* in terms of the one being tested.

For the person who is making the choice, it is called a *nisayon*, since he is standing between two paths [to see] if he will choose the good or not.

But Hashem, Who is testing us, is commanding us to bring the matter out from potential to actuality, so we will have *s'char* (benefit) for the *ma'aseh tov* (the good action), and not only *s'char* for the *lev tov* (good heart)...

[After the end of the *Akeidah*, G-d says — “For now I know that you fear Hashem...”] —

Initially, his fear [of G-d] was in potential; it had not actually been expressed in this great action. Now, however, it had become known in action, his *zechut* (merit) became complete, and his benefit was full from Hashem, the G-d of Israel.

Hashem is not giving the *nisayon* in order to know what the person will do. It is clear to Him what the person will do. Rather the *nisayon* is for the person to bring the matter out from potential to actuality. Hashem knew that the level of Avraham was *yerei Elokim* (G-d fearing), and filled with love and dedication to Hashem. However, as long as he hadn't actually stood up to this test, it was within the heart of Avraham only in potential. The purpose of the *nisayon* was, therefore, [in the words of the Ramban] to bring the matter out from potential to actuality, in order to give him *s'char* (benefit), not only for the *lev tov* (good heart), but also for the *ma'aseh tov* (the good action).

The **Ramban** (*Sha'ar HaGemul* #3) spells this point out —

The benefit of actually expressing *emunah* is greater than its benefit in potential alone. Therefore, G-d gives the *tzadik* the ability to demonstrate it in his positive actions.

The **Ohr Gedalyahu** (*Va'era Hei*) writes similarly —

The purpose of a *nisayon* is to bring out the qualities of a person, from potential to actuality, so they are openly expressed. Avraham was certainly created with great abilities; they simply needed to be expressed openly. Through the ten tests, the form (*tzura*) of Avraham was completed, like the *tzura* of Avraham which was above, complete, and with all of its powers... After Avraham was tested with these ten tests and had stood up to all of them, all of his qualities had been transformed from potential to actuality.. he reached the ultimate in *shleimut* (completion), which is indicated by the number ten, and he had no need for any further tests.

The **Seforno** (on the *Akeidah*) also explains this —

G-d was testing Avraham not to determine whether he would sacrifice his son or not [which was obvious]. Rather He was drawing forth the potential inner powers of faith and trust which were latent in Avraham, bringing them to the fore, and translating them into actuality through the *Akeidah*. In this manner, man also fulfills his purpose, which is to imitate his Creator, Who also manifests Himself in this world *b'po'eil* — through the actual (i.e., His works), and not only *b'koach*, in potential. The goal is that a person be as similar as possible to his Creator, as the verse testifies when it says — “He made man in His image, and like His form.” (*Sha'arei Aharon* on the *Akeidah*)

The **Maharal** (*Pirkei Avot* 5:3) elaborates on this —

We need to know that Hashem tests a *tzadik* with a *nisayon* in order that his righteousness be expressed openly, and that he not remain a hidden *tzadik*. Avraham was fit for all of the elevations which Hashem gave to him only because his righteousness was expressed.

Therefore, the verse says — “*Elokim* (*midat hadin* — the quality of judgment) tested Avraham,” and not “Hashem (YKVK) (*midat harachamim* — the quality of mercy) tested Avraham.” The *nisayon* meant that Hashem wanted the righteousness of Avraham to be known through *midat hadin* (justice), not *midat harachamim* (mercy). And knowledge through *midat hadin* is only when it is completely open and revealed, which is certainly good for the person.

The **Menorat HaMe'or** (5:3:1:3) points out — Before a person performs his action, he thinks in his mind how he will go about it. But [even] after he thinks this in his mind, he [still] needs to actually do the action.

The **Akeidat Yitzchak** (#21) explains —

The *shleimut* of everything is [only] through its expression. A matter is called complete [only] when its actions are complete.

**Rav Aryeh Kaplan** (Handbook of Jewish Thought — 3:53, 3:54) writes —

G-d sometimes tests a person in order to give him *s'char* (benefit). This is because there is no *s'char* for potential alone, as it is written, “Your **work** shall be rewarded” (*Divrei HaYamim* II 15:7). A test may also make a task more difficult so as to increase its *s'char*. Moreover, a test is often needed to make a person's potential and ability known to himself, so as to increase his self-confidence.

**Rav Yerucham Levovitz** (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 2:39) elaborates on this —

The foundation of this world is *midat hadin* (the quality of justice). And the outgrowth of this is the concept of “*adam l'amal yulad* — people are born for toil,” since we can't attain anything without toil and exertion...

In terms of this, we need to understand the importance of *ma'aseh* (actions). The entire Torah is filled with this foundation of *ma'aseh*, and this world is referred to as the world of action. Since the foundation of the creation is exclusively toil and exertion, this is expressed specifically through *ma'aseh*.

According to this, we can explain the whole concept of *nisyonot*...

Even before the *ma'aseh*, nothing was lacking in Avraham — his fear [of G-d] was complete, and nothing at all was added afterwards. However, the principle is that Hashem wanted to create the world with *midat hadin* (the quality of judgment), and it is impossible to attain and merit anything through *midat hadin* except through toil and exertion. And while it is true that nothing was lacking in Avraham even before the *Akeidah*, the fear of G-d which was [exclusively] in his heart, was not really worth anything... Only once he had actually gone through the *nisayon*, with toil and exertion...only through this did Avraham merit all that he gained through the *Akeidah*.

[**Rav Yerucham** (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 3:244) says further that] most people misunderstand the concept of bringing something from potential to actuality. They think there is no difference at all whether something is in potential or in actuality. And it seems [initially] that they are right, since there is nothing in the actualization except what was in the potential. However, this is really a serious mistake. The distance from something in potential until it is expressed in actuality is more distant than from east to west. And the truth is that we see the complete difference in both form and appearance, even from good to bad, and sweet to bitter... There are many people whose intentions and thoughts are always good, and stand only for good. But even though they really want to do good, the actions which they express are bad and very lowly... This is truly a great wonder. How can we reconcile their initial [positive] thoughts with their final [negative] actions?...

We see this with every case of potential being expressed in actuality, such as fire coming out of flint or when we light a match. At the time when it is in actuality, we see the fire, in its form and appearance. And when it was only in potential, as a piece of flint or a match, it was a completely

different entity. It had no warmth at all, it was only cold... So how did it go out from this potential to be expressed as fire?... We are necessarily forced to conclude that the middle stage here, like hitting the rock or igniting the match...is what brought the potential to actuality. And through this process, it became transformed into a different existence, into actual fire. And this is similarly true with the entire creation...

There is a remarkable treasure in our world — that each and every one of us has been given the ability and knowledge to be a creator — to transform things from quality to quality, situation to situation, and from one world to another. This is the great gift which Hashem has bestowed upon His creations, that they, too, can be a part of the creation, as partners in *ma'aseh bereshit* (the creation of the world)...

Every *tzelem Elokim* (person who was created in G-d's image) was given power, in potential, and the purpose of man in his *avodah* (service) is to express these potentials of being *b'tzelem Elokim*, into actuality... That is to say, it is incumbent on the person to create himself — to bring out his potential, his *tzelem Elokim*. Then he will truly be called man...

And now let's explain what we began with in terms of *nisyonot*. We asked what the distinction is between before a *nisayon* and afterwards. And according to what we said, it is literally like two different worlds. Initially it was the world of creation, and afterwards the world of doing... [This explains the unfortunate reality why,] even when the potentials [within a person] are very good, this is not necessarily what will be expressed in actuality.

The **Sifteï Chaim** (*Parshat Va'era — Akeidah*) addresses a seeming contradiction with this — On the one hand, the essential quality of our *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d) is the *penimiut* (internal), as the Rabbis teach — “*Rachmana liba bouy — G-d wants the heart.*” However, on the other hand, the *penimiut* alone is not sufficient. We also need to bring the *lev tov* (good heart) out into *ma'aseh tov* (a good action)...

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (#16) [explains] — “*Adam nifal k'fi pe'ulotav — A person is formed according to his actions*”...whether positive or negative.

While “*Rachmana liba bouy — G-d wants the heart,*” the heart [itself] is drawn after and affected by the actions of the person — for both good and bad...

And, therefore, Chazal (our Sages of blessed memory) say — “*Ratza HaKadosh Boruch Hu l'zakot et Yisrael, l'fichach hirbah lahem Torah uMitzvot — Hashem wanted to give Israel merit. Therefore He increased Torah and mitzvot for them*”...since it is our good actions which transform us to be better, and to merit eternity.

This great foundation, which we learn from the *Sefer HaChinuch*, that we should increase our Torah and *mitzvot*, was not referring to an extreme case of an evil person, where the additional Torah and *mitzvot* are needed to transform him from a *lev ra* (bad heart) to a *lev tov* (good heart). It was said even about one with a *lev tov*, like Avraham!... Why would [even] he need an increase in Torah and *mitzvot*? Wouldn't it be sufficient that he have a *lev tov*?... [This shows us that] only through actual *ma'asim* of Torah and *mitzvot* will the [good] thoughts become stronger in [a person] and his *penimiut* (internal) become more and more elevated.

## Second — *Nisyonot* Lift Us Up

**Rav Hirsch** (*Bereshit* 22:1) discusses the verse — “**G-d tested (*nisah*) Avraham**” — *Nisah* is related to *nasah* (with a *samech*), *nasach*, *nasah* (with a *sin*): to move far away, to cast far away, to raise on high. The common denominator of these three roots is — *to advance something to a further or higher point*. So, too, *nasah* (with a *samech*), as regards physical or moral powers, means “to try” or “to test”; that is, to subject these powers to challenges they had never faced before. Thus, every trial or test is an ascent, in that it strengthens and energizes powers that already exist but have not yet withstood the test of further or higher challenges. A cable that has already withstood the strain of carrying 50 pounds is tested to determine if it can also carry 51 pounds. In the case of physical and moral powers, testing strengthens and elevates them.

**Rashi** comments on the verse (*Shemot* 20:17) — “**For G-d has come in order to test (*nasot*) you.**” Based on the *Mechilta*, he explains —

“*Nasot*” means — “To exalt you and make you great in this world. Your name will then be known among the nations, since Hashem revealed Himself to you.” In other words, “*nasot*” is [being used as] an expression of elevation and greatness, as in “erect a flagpole (*neis*),” “I will hoist my banner (*nisi*),” “and like a pole (*neis*) on top of the hill.”

The **Netziv** (*HaEmek Davar* — *Bereshit* 22:1) explains that there are other meanings to the word “*nisah*” —

Similar to what it says in *Tehillim* (60:6) — “*Natata lireiyecha nes l'hit'noses* – You gave a banner to be raised high for those who fear You” — [Avraham] was lifted up like a banner. Chazal explain this language of “*nisah*” — that the abilities or powers of Avraham were lifted up and raised to the ultimate spiritual greatness of the Jewish nation... Hashem lifted him up bit by bit, higher and higher.

**Rav Yehoshua Hartman**, in his notes on the Maharal (*Pirkei Avot* 5:3), points out that — The word *nes* is explained as an *ote* or a *mofet* (a sign or a wonder)... This teaches us that Chazal equated *nisayon* with *mofet* (something wondrous). (Note #350)

The **Abarbanel** writes —

The term *nisayon* comes from “*nes*” since *nisonos* are like a pole. They establish a person on an elevated place as a sign and a proof. (*Mishnayot Mesivta* — *Pirke Avot* 5:3)

The **Sefat Emet** (*Lech Lecha* — pg. 44) adds that —

A person is elevated to a higher level through a *nisayon*. The term *nisa* is a term of *ramah* (elevation).

**Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliahu* 1:222) describes the process of how people grow — *Isarusa d'l'eila* (inspiration from above) [eventually] ceases and then a *nisayon* comes in its place. Every *aliya* has two aspects — *Isarusa d'l'eila* is given initially with great *rachamim* (mercy), but one needs to acquire it afterwards, once it is removed, through receiving a *nisayon*. One then acquires it with *din* (justice) once one has stood up to this difficult *nisayon*.

### **Third — *Nisyonot* Are beyond *Teva***

The **Sefat Emet** (*Rosh Hashanah*) explains —

In truth, every *nisayon* is a *nes* (miracle) which is happening through the person. It is a sign (*ote*) that this person is clinging to the upper root, above the *teva* (nature)... Every deviation from the natural order is called a *nes*. (Maharal — *Derech Chaim* — *Pirkei Avot* 5:3 — # 351)

**Rav Yehoshua Hartman**, in his notes on the Maharal (*Pirkei Avot* 5:3, #352), explains — The very essence of a *nisayon* is whether a person will overcome his nature, and thereby stand up to the test, or be drawn after his nature, and fail the test. The *nisayon* involves the person standing in a situation where he needs to choose between two possibilities — *teva* or not *teva*.

**Rav Yerucham Levovitz** (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 3:119) discusses the concept of *teva* (nature) —

What is *teva*? The creation with inherent confusions built into it. The Ramchal tells us, in *Da'at Tevunot*, that the entire creation is with *hester panim* (G-d being hidden)... And the first chapter of the *Mesilat Yeshtarim* says similarly that the whole world is nothing but a *nisayon*...entirely built on confusions, to test man...

The entire *avodah* of man is to remove...these confusions, and to understand and recognize the absolute truth... People need to contemplate the depth within every aspect of the creation, and to recognize the *nisayon*. And if one doesn't recognize it, one needs to accept that the confusions are in him.

The term *nisayon* (test) is always related to *nes* (miracle). Just like a *nes* is beyond *teva* (nature), a *nisayon* is also beyond *teva*. If the one being tested wouldn't act beyond *teva*, he would be unable to stand up to the *nisayon*.

The ***Sha'arei Aharon*** (on the *Akeidah*) says in the name of **Rav Dessler** —  
When a person succeeds in a *nisayon*, he raises the level of his *nekudat habechira* (point of freewill). In other words, his *bechira* will no longer be in this area where he was tested and succeeded. From now on, his *bechira* will be only in a more elevated aspect. The word “*nisah*” (tested) is thus explained according to its simple meaning, since he has now become elevated [which is also “*nisah*”].

#### Fourth — Publicity to Others

The **Rambam** (*Moreh Nevuchim* — 3:24) writes —

Realize that the purpose of every *nisayon* in the Torah is for people to know what they need to do, and what is proper for them to believe. The concept of a *nisayon*, where someone does something, is not [only] for the sake of that particular action, but its purpose is [also] to be a lesson, which we should learn from and follow after.

The Rambam points out that the word *l'nasot* means “to make an example of something.” (Notes in Artscroll commentary on Ramban — *Shemot* 16:4)

The ***Pirkei Moshe*** adds, to explain the words of the **Rambam** —

The main purpose of a *nisayon* is to make known and to publicize the righteousness of the *tzadikim* in order for others to learn from them. (Notes in *Mishnayot Mesivta* — *Pirkei Avot* 5:3)

The **Maharal** (*Pirkei Avot* 5:3) agrees —

The *nisayon* of the *tzadik* is to make known to the world that he is a *tzadik*... And, similarly, the *tzadikim* are evaluated and tested so that people will know their accomplishments, and why Hashem gave them benefit.

The **Meiri** explains the purpose of a *nisayon* —

So that others will learn from him, do, and walk in his ways. They will know just how fitting it is for a person to do, to persevere, and to trouble oneself for the honor of his Creator. (Note #36 in *Mishnayot Mesivta* — *Pirkei Avot* 5:3)

The **Ran** (*Drush* #6) also discusses the concept of tests —

One type of test is for the benefit of the group. For example, the group should see just how great the love of those who love G-d reaches, and they should take this as a lesson for themselves.

The **Zohar** (*Bereshit* 140a) explains —

The *nisayon* will end up glorifying them (i.e., the *tzadikim*) even more. The verse (*Bereshit* 22:1) tells us — “*v'haElokim nisah et Avraham*” — G-d tested Avraham” — The term “*nisah*” can also refer to a *nes*, meaning that G-d raised Avraham's banner throughout the world.

**Rav Aryeh Kaplan** (The Handbook of Jewish Thought — 3:54) adds —

In some cases, G-d also tests a person in order to make his good qualities known to others. It is for this reason that G-d often tests a person before choosing him for greatness or leadership.

The **Menorat HaMe'or** (5:3:1:3) writes —

Although Hashem checks a person's heart, and knows whether he will stand up to his *nisayon* or not, he still tests him, to reveal his heart and his actions before people who don't recognize what he has in his heart, and to make him great in their eyes.

**Rabbeinu Bachye** (*Shemot* 13:17 — Intro to *Beshalach*) discusses the purpose of *nisayonot* — G-d tests the heart through bringing people to a *bechira* and a *nisayon*. Besides examining the heart for His own sake, G-d also evaluates a person to publicize the merit of his heart to others... Tests are needed for the sake of others who don't know what is concealed, but only what is

revealed before their eyes... Therefore, when a *tzadik* has been tested, so his thoughts are now manifest to all, that demonstrates the full extent of how to serve G-d. It thus serves to sanctify G-d's name in the world.

And, finally, the **Ramban** (*Shaar HaGemul* #3) cautions us — G-d benefits the *tzadik* by allowing him to manifest his positive actions... G-d's testing is positive, and not revenge or affliction [G-d forbid]... It increases benefit to the one being tested, and it elevates G-d's name by showing the extent that He is beloved and feared, and how much people want to do His *mitzvot* and His will.

### **Fifth — Nisayon Relates to Hergel (Habituation)**

The **Ramban** (*Shemot* 20:17) discusses the verse — “**For G-d has come in order to test you**” —

It is possible to say that [it means] — G-d has come to **habituate/accustom** you to have *emunah* in Him. Since He showed you the revelation of His Divine Presence, His *emunah* entered your heart to connect to Him, and your soul will not separate from that *emunah* forever... Based on other verses, we see that *nisah* means to be accustomed to something.

The **Rambam**, in *Moreh Nevuchim*, explains this verse (*Shemot* 20:17) similarly — Moshe told the nation — Hashem has now come to test you in the future, and in order that you will be able to stand faithfully with Him through every test you have. (Notes in Artscroll commentary on Ramban — *Shemot* 16:4)

**HaR'am Alashkar** points out — The language of *nisayon* also relates to the concept of *hergel* (being used to something); meaning that Hashem got Avraham more accustomed to His service. (*Medrash Shmuel* on *Pirkei Avot* 5:3)

The **Biur Yosef Bamerkavat HaMishnah** says similarly — The *nisayon* comes to accustom a person to fulfill the will of his Creator. The language of *nisayon* is related to *hergel* (being used to something) and *limud* (to learn something). (*Mishnayot Mesivta* — *Pirkei Avot* 5:3)

### **Sixth — Nisyonot Evaluate and Strengthen Our Emunah**

The **Rambam** (*Moreh HaNevuchim* 3:24) writes — It appears that the *nisyonot* mentioned in the Torah are coming as a test and evaluation, until the degree of *emunah* for both a particular person and nation will be known, along with their spiritual ability... As it says (*Devarim* 13:4) — “G-d your L-rd has tested you to know whether you love Hashem.” And also (*Devarim* 8:2) — “To know what is inside your heart”... The purpose of the entire Torah, with everything it contains, with its positive *mitzvot* and its prohibitions, its aspirations and stories, are all about one thing — fear of G-d. The verse (*Devarim* 28:58) tells us — “Guard to do all the words of this Torah which are written in this book, to fear this exalted and awesome Name.”

**Rabbeinu Bachye** (*Shemot* 13:17, 15:22, *Devarim* 8:16) says similarly — Everything which happened to the Jews in the desert was a deliberate trial, to increase their level of *bitachon* (trust in G-d), [which is] the source of *emunah* (belief in G-d), through rational awareness. This was done so they would be fit to receive the Torah.

They were also tested with the manna which fell from Heaven daily, but only an amount sufficient for that day, and not for several days. All these experiences were trials to develop and implant *bitachon*... There was never such a test of a nation, traveling three days without water in the desert, in the hot summer, with their wives and children... It also served to implant in them the attribute of *bitachon* — trusting G-d.

The verse tells us — “In order to afflict you, to test you, and to do good for you in the end.” All the difficulties they experienced in the desert were only for the purpose of testing them. This was to

train them in the aspects of trust in G-d, and to bring *emunah* in G-d into their hearts, until serving G-d would become an inherent part of their nature.

The **Ramchal** (*Da'at Tevunot* 124) writes — Tests are relevant for the *tzadikim*, but not in terms of being an enticement to transgress. Rather, the essential *nisayon* comes from the Master hiding His face. That is because G-d has told us through all of His prophets that He is the *Mashgiach* (Supervisor) over all of His creations. And His eyes are on all the ways of man in order to give to every person, according to his behavior and actions — “*Keil emunah v'ein avel* — G-d is reliable and without iniquity.”

After we have understood all of this, Hashem guides His world with [seeming] confusions and mysteries, which, G-d forbid, appear to be the opposite of this. Sometimes it looks as if everything is random, while at other times it seems that the wicked are successful, and we don't [always] see that the righteous who serve Hashem receive and benefit from all of their efforts... The *nisayon* is to see if people will stand firm in their *emunah* (belief)... Will we say that “*Keil emunah v'ein avel* — G-d is reliable without iniquity” is definitely true, even though we don't understand His ways?... A huge space was left open in the *Shleimut* (Perfection) above, and a place was left for evil to darken the face of the world for this great test... However, even this enormous darkness of hiding the face of His goodness is exclusively for His *Kavod* (Honor), and will [ultimately] result in much more *s'char* (spiritual benefit) for the *tzadikim*.

**Rav Yerucham Levovitz** (*Da'at Chachma uMussar* — 3:37) discusses tests —

It is amazing for the verse (*Devarim* 13:4) to explain [why a false prophet is given the ability to perform authentic miracles] — “Because Hashem is testing you”...

We learn the ways of Hashem from this — To what extent can a person be tested? To the point that a false prophet is able to do real signs and wonders! And this has been the situation from the day that Adam HaRishon first transgressed in *Gan Eden*. People have been given tests in every place where they could err, and it is up to them to stand up to these tests, to recognize the truth, and to separate between truth and lies. The power which is given to the *yetzer* is remarkable, almost complete control, to the point that people are able to imagine that he is the ruler of the world...

This teaches us the *avoda kasha* (very difficult work) which is placed on people. To stand up to great and exalted tests all of one's life...

The concept of tests is that they are beyond our [intellectual] understanding...and even so, we should not question Hashem about them...and our hearts should still be complete with *emunah* (belief) in Hashem. And this was the level of the *Avot* (forefathers).

The **Chafetz Chaim** (*Shem Olam* — Chap. 3) explains —

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

And, finally, the **Klausenberger Rebbe** spells this out —

We all need to know that G-d tests us with one test after another, to reveal whether we have proper *emunah*. (**Shefa Chaim**)

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