



A LIFE OF FACING CHALLENGES

GIVE ME A LITTLE BREAK!

There's a famous *medrash* that Rashi brings on the meaning of the word **וישב יעקב**, namely, that the term *vayeishev* insinuates that Yaakov Avinu wanted rest (Bereishis 37:2).¹ He wanted **מרגוע** (restfulness). He had been in *galus* for many years, and was coming back to settle in Eretz Yisrael, the land of his forefathers. The *medrash* says **יעקב יושב בשלוה**, Yaakov wanted to dwell in his place in peace. Can you imagine this? It's hard for us to put ourselves in Yaakov Avinu's shoes, but let's picture it in our own lives. If we had very strong familial ties and we were a descendant of a very illustrious family that had a lot of history in Eretz Yisrael and we were forced under difficult circumstances to flee into *galus* and to live among evil people and raise a family, we could only imagine what it would mean for us to come back and be able to breathe that air once again and to just feel at home once again. About Yaakov Avinu, it says **יעקב יושב בשלוה**. He wanted to have a little *shalvah*.

In our world, we're very familiar with this. Every time a Yom Tov comes in and the lady of the house has to entertain the whole family and maybe some kiddies and maybe some brothers-in-law, she takes a big breath, and says, "I can't wait for the Yom Tov to be over. I want to live *beshalvah* now." They want to go on vacation. Sometimes they say, "Next Yom Tov, I'm going to a hotel." People have all kinds of ideas. People go on vacation, and they come back and say, "I need another vacation from my vacation."

But what happened with Yaakov Avinu? **קפץ עליו רגזו של יוסף**, the challenge of sale of *Yosef* came upon him, sprung upon him. This came out of nowhere. You know, he had a father-in-law who was a *ramai, nu*, that we've heard of before. That's not unheard of. They promise you the moon, and when it comes to delivery, they tell you, "Amazon is down today. The computers are not working." But to have a son, your son *Yosef*, your *ben zekunim*, your *bar chakim* disappear on you, is something that comes out of nowhere. That's something from left field.

Chazal tell us at the time when **יעקב יושב בשלוה**, **צדיקים מבקשים לישב בשלוה**, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, **לא דיין לצדיקים**, is it not enough for the *tzaddikim* that which I have prepared for them in *olam haba*? **אלא שמבקשים לישב בשלוה בעולם הזה**, they want to be *leishev beshalvah* in *olam hazeh*?

Now, the tendency of every person that I know, at least among my peers, is to seek *shalvah*. You go to Eretz Yisrael, where the people have stressful lives. They don't have so many conveniences, like cars. I'm talking about the *yungerleit*. And they have a lot of kids. And they're running all day eking out a living. Even there, there are certain times of the year when everybody goes on vacation. Sometimes after Yom Tov, sometimes in the summer. I've seen the biggest paupers get away, and I say, "How do you afford it? It's not cheap." "*Chiyuni*" they say. "It's my life. This is not a luxury. I need this for my sanity, for my family's sanity. I want my kids to grow up thinking that there's some family time in life. There's some joy in life."

The *emes* is you have to really think about it to understand it. What does the Torah want from us?

LIFE IS NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF TESTS

The Ramchal, in the beginning of his *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* (1:8) says that this world is a place of challenges.² Don't take your mind off of that *yesod* for one second. Every morning when you wake up, you have to constantly say, "I'm going to face a series of *nisyonos* today." My whole purpose of being in this world is just to pass a series of tests.

Now, a person says, "What's wrong with having a little *shalvah*?" Imagine you have a company. The employees work hard, and the pay is good. One day, the boss brings in two big sofas. La-Z-Boys. And he says, "Anybody who wants to take a break and wants to relax, be my guest. But as long as you're sitting on that chair, you're off the clock." Do you think those chairs would stay in good shape, or would they wear out very quickly? Would anybody sit in that chair? No. Those chairs would remain in pristine condition because if a guy knows he's sitting on that chair and he's going off the clock, and this place pays very good pay for every minute that you work, a guy would have to be a nut to sit in the La-Z-Boy chair instead of making money.

A person has to know that in this world, you're here to pass tests. There is no day and no situation that there aren't tests.

Now, many people don't like tests, so they do everything they can to avoid the tests. They go on vacation. They go here. They do what they want, how they want, and when they want. People miss *davening* because they're too lazy. "I work hard enough. I can't get out in the morning. I came home after a whole day. You want me to get out again? Oh please. I mean, it's cold. It's snowing. It's

¹ **וישב**, בקש יעקב לישב בשלוה, קפץ עליו רגזו של יוסף – צדיקים מבקשים לישב בשלוה, אמר הקב"ה לא דיין לצדיקים מה שמתקן להם לעולם אשמים לישב בשלוה בעולם הזה.
² ונמצא שהוא מושם באמת בתוך המלחמה החזקה, כי כל עניני העולם בין לטוב בין לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם, העני מצד אחד והעשר מצד אחד כענין שאמר שלמה (משלי ל'): פן אשבע וכחשתי ואמרתני מי ה', ופן אורש וגנבתי וכו'. השלוה מצד אחד והיסורין מצד אחד, עד שנמצאת המלחמה אליו פנים ואחור.

icy. It's too hot. It's too this. I can't get out." So the guy says, "I'll *daven* at home." For a short time, that works, and then he stops *davening* altogether.

People don't realize that Hashem will suddenly come down upon them. They think they beat the game. First of all, they lost unbelievable opportunities. But suddenly, you know what's going to happen? They're going to get sick, and when they get sick, they go to the rabbi. The rabbi tells them, "Do you *daven* three times a day in *shul*?" "Uh." "I think you should start. Go to visit Hashem." Now the guy comes to visit the shul. The rabbi says, "If you're coming, you should start to *daven* like a *mentsch*." All of a sudden, the guy is behaving a *shtickel* like a regular Jew.

DO YOU LIVE ON EASY STREET OR ARE YOU A SOLDIER?

Here is a fellow who doesn't take Hashem seriously. He likes to chill. He's a chiller. A lot of people are like that. Suddenly there's a tragedy in his family, *rachmana litzlan*. It should never happen to anybody but it happens. A child gets sick. All of a sudden, the guy takes it up a notch and he becomes serious.

Watching my grandfather (Rav Avigdor Miller), I saw he was someone who never took his eye off the ball. He knew every single second that he was facing challenges. And he tried to bring Hashem into his life in every form, and way that was possible. I also saw my father. He was a soldier. He never ever missed *davening*. Never. He once came to Cleveland only on the condition there's going to be a *minyán* waiting for him when he arrives. I remember my father staying up until very late at night every single night. We had a dining room and a living room. There was a table in the living room, where my father used to learn. There were two couches in the living room. I don't remember my father ever sitting on the couch or lying on the couch. I laid on the couch. If I would talk to him, I would sit on the couch, and he would sit on the chair. Why? Because my father and my grandfather were soldiers.

My *rebbe* (Rav Meir Halevi Soloveichik), was a total soldier, totally in the game of keeping his eyes always focused, looking out for the enemy. They all understood that if you take a break it's only going to cost you a lot of future interest and if you quit the job, *chas veshalom*, Hashem is going to bring you back on. You could watch people. It's not normal. You have to study the *Avos* to know how to act.

YAAKOV AVINU GROWS IN HIS NISYONOS

Now, everybody understands that when Yaakov came back to Eretz Yisrael, he didn't want to be a chicken farmer. He had enough of that. He didn't want to be with the sheep, the spotted sheep, the speckled sheep, the lined sheep, the white sheep, and the brown sheep. Enough with the sheep! You know what I mean? Let me get back to work with what I was built for.

You should know that Yaakov made an *avodas Hashem* from the sheep, too. You know what kind of *avodas Hashem* he made? After working seven years for Rochel and getting ripped off by Lavan, he worked a second set of seven years. What do you think was harder to do honestly? The second seven years or the first? Obviously, the second seven years. The first seven years, he was thinking about his wife. He's getting married. He's going to have a family soon. He'll start Klal Yisrael. He was all pumped. Then he comes and gets ripped off. But *Chazal* tell us he worked the second set of seven years as well as he did the first one. He did it *be'emunah*, with unbelievable faithfulness.

Now, you know how much more he grew from the second set of seven years? Every time he was challenged, he could have said to himself, "Listen, one sheep more or one sheep less, it's not going to make a difference to Lavan." And it wasn't. But it will make a difference to Hashem. So it made a difference to Yaakov. Yaakov pushed himself. He got ripped off a hundred times. You know what that means to say? That every time he got ripped off he grew more in the *middah* of *emes*. Yaakov wasn't naive. He definitely knew that this guy was ripping him off. I mean, how big of a gangster could you become? How big of a *ramai*? Lavan was *mechadesh chiddushim* in the level of *rishus*. He distinguished himself by his *rishus*. Detestable. And every time Hashem gave Yaakov Avinu another test, he passed the test to successfully develop more honesty. Yaakov's hallmark, it says in the Torah, is *תתן אמת ליעקב*. *Shpitz emes* in the face of *shpitz sheker*. No one would have had any *ta'anos* on him. And he pushed himself to act with more *emes* and more *emes*. He never stopped having *nisyonos*.

GREAT OPPORTUNITY! BECOME A GIVER!

Here is a fellow who had a wife. This fellow wasn't a very nice person. He didn't enjoy giving so much. He enjoyed taking. He told his wife very clearly before he got married, "I expect you to really take good care of me. I'm looking forward to a relationship where you're going to give, and I'm going to receive." This guy had a *meshugas*. Then he got married. His wife was a very needy person. She didn't come from an easy background. She asked him many times a day, the following question, "Do you love me? Do you like me?" Am I fat? Am I this? Am I that? She was looking for reassurance. The more she asked, the more this guy got really ticked off. He said, "You know, you're not well." They went to a psychologist for her, and he said, "You know what she's like? She's like a wastebasket with a hundred holes. You pour water into it. But it doesn't make a difference how much you pour. There are a hundred holes. The water comes out of every one of them. She never gets satisfied."

I told the guy, "Why do you think Hashem put you together with this wife?" He said, "I don't know. She's seriously not well." I said, "Hashem put her together with you because you have a weakness. You're a taker and not a giver, and Hashem wants to make

you a giver because there's a *mitzvah* called - והלכת בדרכיו מה הוא חנון אף אתה חנון - ³ Hashem wants you to become a giver." He said, "I can't do it."

I said, "Let's do a test." His wife used to scream. If his wife asked if he loved her and he didn't guess the right answer, she would start to scream. The whole building would hear her. She wasn't embarrassed at all. He would walk out of the house, and she would open the door and scream in the halls at the top of her lungs. I told her, "It's embarrassing." She said, "So?!" That's what she said.

Anyway, I finally told the guy, "Why don't you do a test? Test this out. Everything she asks you just say, 'yes' or 'no.' 'Do you love me?' 'Yes.' 'Am I cute?' 'Yes.' 'Am I fat?' 'No.' Whatever she asks, just say short answers. If she asks you for speeches, we'll worry about it then." He did it. I called him the next day, "How did it go?" "*Baruch Hashem* a quiet day." The next day also. It went like this for about six weeks. The guy tried *be'emes*. She would drive him crazy with her questions, but he would say, "Yes, no, no, yes." Big deal. It was nothing. After six weeks, his wife calls me up, and she's screaming on the phone. I said, "What's the matter?" "He said he hates me, and I'm fat." I called him up. I said, "Are you a *shoteh*? What did you do?" He said, "Rebbi, I can't suck it up that much. I did as much as I could." I said, "Are you a *tipesh*? Are you an ox?" I said, "Hashem will decide." I said, "Six weeks of peace in your life and you *shteiged*. Now you go back to the drawing board, or you're going to get pounded. Don't come back to me again." He got divorced eventually.

Then he married again. "Rebbi, now I found the right one." I said, "Everyone has to be tested. We come to this world to grow." A year later, divorce number two. He found out that she was crazy. Then, he got married a third time. He just married wife number four. He told me, "I think I figured it out now." No, he didn't. He didn't understand his test and what he had to correct.

"YOU REALLY WANT SHELEIMUS!"

When a person doesn't realize that everything in this world is a test, and these tests are our job in this world to get us to *olam haba*, it's a tragedy of tragedies! And if a person realizes that he's being tested and "takes" those tests, do you know what kind of *shteiging* a person can do? If Yaakov would have come back to Eretz Yisrael and sat and *shteiged* and learned, what do you think would have happened? Would he have *shteiged*? Of course. Do you think he would have *shteiged* as much as he did through the test of ריגוזו של יוסף? No. Now that he lost Yosef, did he get depressed? Did he ever miss a *davening*? Did he ever miss learning? Did he ever get angry at Hashem? Do you know what kind of *avodas Hashem* it was when he was under the impression that he lost his *olam haba*? He had a *siman* that was given to him that if one of his children dies, he forfeits his *olam haba*! And to go *vaiter* (to continue) and say, "Hashem, I'm doing this for You." No *olam haba*. I'm *davening* - no *olam haba*. I'm learning Torah - no *olam haba*. How many people do you know that would go to work if they thought they weren't getting paid? Not many. "I'm sorry. You're taking advantage of me. I'm not doing it."

I can't imagine the *avodas Hashem* that Yaakov had during those twenty years thinking he lost his *olam haba*. It's unbelievable! Hashem tells him, "You want *shalvah*? No. That's not what you really want. I know what you want. You want to get the *shpitz shleimus* that's possible. That's what I'm going to give you."

A person has to understand this purifier system and realize that it never stops. It never stops. You're here in this world for one thing, and one thing only - and that one thing is to purify yourself, to be *metzaref* yourself, to *mamash* get your game together. That's what a person has to know.

Here is a fellow whose wife gets sick, *lo aleinu*. The fellow now is forced by necessity to take care of his house. He becomes in charge of the meals, the kids, waking up, dressing, and he can't learn anymore. He's *ois mentsch*. He came to an *adam gadol*, and he said, "What do I have from this? Okay, so I'm trying to be the best mother I can be, but I'm not learning one word. I can't do any learning. What's the purpose of this?" You know what the *adam gadol* told him? "That's what Hashem wants of you right now. Right now, Hashem doesn't want you to be learning. Hashem wants to see if you're going to rise to the occasion when it's against every bone in your body. Hashem wants to see if you will do it, if you will accept it, and grow from it."

PUSH YOURSELF TO THE MAX

My *rebbe* used to say a story from the Kotzker. One time, *chassidim* were standing with the Kotzker after Rosh Hashanah. The Kotzker said, "I can tell every one of you what you requested from Hashem on Rosh Hashanah." One *ba'al agalah*, a wagon driver, says, "Rebbe, what did I ask for?" "I'll tell you. *Pashut*. You said Ribono Shel Olam, 'My life is so hard. All day long I *shlep* things. I carry. I fix. I clean. I feed the horses. It's cold. It's freezing. It's raining. It's muddy. It's hot. It's a difficult job, a whole day back and forth on bumpy roads. I finally come to *minchah*, and after I *daven*, I sit down. They're learning *mishnayos*. I open a *mishnayos*, and the next thing I know, I bump my nose on the *mishnayos*. Boom! I wake up.' You said to the Ribono Shel Olam, 'I make x amount of rubles a week. Take off two hundred rubles. Take it off. But let my learning go better. Let my *davening* go better. I can be a *mentsch*. I could *daven ma'ariv* like a *mentsch*. I could learn *mishnayos* like a *mentsch*. I could get up in the morning like a *mentsch* instead of being just a worn out rag.'"

The *ba'al agalah* looked at the Rebbe, and the Rebbe said, "Nu? What do you say? Did I get it?" He said, "That's exactly what I asked, *taka*. Do you perhaps know what they answered in Shamayim?" He said, "Yeah." "What did they answer?" "Absolutely not." He said, "Why not? I thought I asked a great thing." He said, "Because what Hashem wants from you is not that you should have an easier

³ על כך נאמר בגמרא סוטה ב"ד ע"א: "ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא: מאי דכתיב 'אחרי ה' אלהים תלכו' - וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שמינה? והלא כבר נאמר 'כי ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא!' אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא: מה הוא מלביש ערומים, דכתיב 'ועש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם', אף אתה הלבש ערומים; הקדוש ברוך הוא ביקר חולים, דכתיב 'וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא', אף אתה בקר חולים; הקדוש ברוך הוא ניחם אבלים, דכתיב 'ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו', אף אתה נחם אבלים; הקדוש ברוך הוא קבר מתים, דכתיב 'ויקבר אותו בגיא', אף אתה קבור מתים". [העניין הזה מופיע גם בגמרא במסכת בז: "אבא שאול אומר: 'ואנוהו' - הי דומה לו: מה הוא חנון ורחום - אף אתה היה חנון ורחום."]. "ע"ק שבת ב"ד

life. Hashem wants you with your challenging life to see if you can push yourself to the max to *daven* the best you can, to push yourself to the max to learn the best you can, to push yourself to the max to *daven ma'ariv* the best you can. Hashem wants you to maximize your efforts. That's the *avodah* that Hashem has in mind for you!"

There's a famous story with the Steipler. He once went in a taxi. The driver told him a similar story. He drives a cab all day long. The Steipler said to him, "Do you go to *shul*?" He said, "Yeah, I go to *shul*. I learn between *minchah* and *ma'ariv*." The Steipler told him, "That little learning in *shamayim* is worth you can't imagine how much!" He pumped him up very high because it was difficult. It's a *nisayon*. And if a person faces *nisyonos* and a person overcomes his *nisyonos*, that's what his *shteiging* is.

THE WEARY TROOPER KEEPS ON GOING!

But you have to know, I'm trying to picture Yosef Hatzaddik in jail for ten years. Every day he had a new *nisayon* to be *mekabel* the *din shamayim*. The first day he comes to jail, you know what he says? "Hashem I accept that it's from You. I know it's from You. I have no *safek* it's from You. And Hashem I'm going to think about You every single second." And there's no question about it, in the back of his mind, you know what he's thinking? That in this *zechus*, that I'm *mekabel din shamayim*, my *tza'ar* is going to pass. The Chafetz Chaim says, that if a person is having *tza'ar* and the person is *mekabel* that it's *min hashamayim bevadai*, for certain, it's *mestalkin lei miyad* (removed from him).

Now, if the Chafetz Chaim writes that, Yosef Hatzaddik also knew it. Yosef Hatzaddik was thinking, "Okay, Hashem *mestalkin lei miyad*." He goes to sleep that night. He says *krias shema al hamitah*. He's certain he's going to wake up tomorrow, and he's going to find out it's a nightmare. He's out of here. The next day *odcha Hashem*, he is still there.

Can you imagine the disappointment? He knows the *passuk* that says *קוה אל ה' חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל ה'*. The *gemara* (Berachos 32b) says there are four things that need *chizuk*.⁴ *Bitachon* is one of them. You think that *bitachon* on the second day is as easy as on the first? No. It's much harder. And the third day it gets harder, and the fourth day it gets harder. And every time Yosef Hatzaddik is *mechazek* — and the next day he says, "I didn't get out, and I don't question Hashem why I didn't get out." Hashem wants him to be there for ten long years before he gets the sign that he's getting out. After ten years! I can't imagine. Ten years! And he never once fell. And he keeps inviting Hashem into another day. Another day with Hashem, and another day with Hashem. And he understands, "Hashem wants me to bring His presence into this world and into this jail and I'm going to do that." He says, "Hashem's desire is that He should have a *dirah betachtonim*." And he brings Hashem in for ten years. Finally, some guy comes to him with a dream and says, "Bingo! This I'm sure, is going to get me out." But he makes a mistake. He tells the fellow who had the dream that, "In three days, you're going to be out of here, and you're going to be in front of Pharaoh. You know why you had this dream? To get me out. You are my ticket out of here. Hashem made you have this dream in order to get me out of here. Don't forget that." And it says he kept on forgetting. This guy who had the dream, kept on forgetting about Yosef. It says in *Chazal* that every day, he made himself all kinds of *simanim* to remember, "Today I'm going to tell Pharaoh." And the *malach* came and undid all the *simanim*. He's trying to remember, and he forgets him. And Yosef has to stay in jail for another two years.

Could you imagine what those last two years were like? He already saw the writing on the wall. The dream came true. Yosef Hatzaddik understood that Hashem didn't care for this minister to be back serving wine again. He couldn't care if the guy was serving wine or not. That didn't have a purpose for Him. The whole thing was for Yosef to get out. But Yosef asked the minister for help. Bam! Bam! Two more years!

How Yosef had to *shteig* those last two years! The level he was at, he was bringing the *shechinah* down to this world! The *dirah betachtonim* that Hashem gained! I have no *safek*, Hashem said every day, *ראו בריה שבראתי בעולמי*, "look at this fellow that I created."

Can you imagine what a *tzaddik* Yosef was? Anybody else would have already said, "Forget about it. Hashem, forget about it. I'm not playing the game anymore. I'm going to suffer in my prison. I'm just going to be depressed. I'm not going to be Jewish anymore. It's all for nothing. It's not fair!" I can understand. I wouldn't have *ta'anos* on anybody. No *ta'anos*. The guy would have failed. The guy would have been a failure. What a tragedy to fail at life!

A person who went through the Holocaust and failed, I don't blame him, but what a tragedy. You could have been such a *tzaddik*. You could have been such a *kadosh*. And you ended up being a failure, a victim, not a survivor. And a Yid who went through the camps and he came out with his *emunah* intact, wow! That guy is *צדיק באמונתו יחיה*. The *olam haba* he is going to get from his *emunah* is simply unimaginable!

NISAYON = OPPORTUNITY

Rabosai, sometimes you get a sickness, *chas veshalom*. You know it's not going to go away tomorrow. Everybody calls up. Everybody wants to know, "How do I get rid of this thing quickly?" I say, "I can't tell you how to get rid of it quickly. Maybe Hashem wants some *avodah* from you now. The *avodah* is going to take a long time. Sometimes months. Sometimes up to a year. Sometimes longer." Sometimes a person gets better after jumping through all the hoops, doing all the *zechusim*. Hashem gives him a little break, and the person is in seventh heaven, and suddenly the Grim Reaper is knocking on the door again. I'm back. *אודך ה' כי עניתני*, let's have *chazaras hashiur*. That's the most heartbreaking thing.

Someone recently called me up. They had fought for a year, the whole family. They had gotten Klal Yisrael to get on board. So many people undertook things. They raised money for *yesomos*. They did so many *mitzvos*. The person grew in this year, unimaginable!

⁴ תנו רבנן: ארבעה צריכין חזוק, ואלו הן: תורה, ומעשים טובים, תפלה, ודרך ארץ (רש"י: דרך ארץ – אם אומן הוא לאומנתו אם סוחר הוא לסחורתו אם איש מלחמה הוא למלחמתו)

He had very serious cancer. He went through an entire year, and Erev Rosh Hashanah he got back the report that the scans were clear. Wow! What a Rosh Hashanah! Then there was a family *chasunah*, and this person with all kinds of problems danced at this *chasunah* in a way they never danced their whole life. There wasn't a dry eye. A couple of months passed, and I got a call. "It's back." I said, "What?" "It's back." "Where?" "In my brain. This part of my body. That part of my body." "Oh no." You become overwhelmed. I told the person I would have to think it over. I'll call him back.

What do you tell somebody who's been in jail for ten years, when he thinks he's getting out and he's stuck with another two years? And Yosef Hatzaddik grew those last two years. He *shteiged*. He was **ישראל אשר בכ אתפאר**. Hashem glorified Himself in such a person. And Hashem knew that Yosef could pass the test. Otherwise, he wouldn't have gotten it.

That's what you have to know is the story of our life. Every one of us. You can have a child and the child is going to give you *tza'ar*. You're going to have a difficult time raising that child. It's not going to be a one-time shot, where he does something wrong and you give them a little punishment, offer him prizes, and he's back on board and everything goes well. It takes years. Sometimes, the suffering is unbelievable. A parent has to say, "Hashem, I know it's from You. I know You're giving me this test. You want me to grow from it. I'm going to try to grow from it." A person has a learning disability, it's very difficult. It's not going to go away in a day. You may get some help. You may learn how to take some medication. You may learn how to employ tactics to fight against your disability, and try to manage it. You say, "It's not fair. Why am I different from everybody else?" That's part of life, my friend. That's the *nisayon* Hashem gave you, and if you pass that *nisayon*, you're going to be *ashrecha*. You're going to be fortunate. And if you fail the *nisayon*, although no one is going to blame you, you're still going to be a tragic victim and not a successful survivor. We should all be *zoiche* to pass the tests that Hashem sends us, to purify ourselves and achieve our ultimate *shleimus*.

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THE BOTTOM LINE

It's understandable that most people will need a family vacation once in a while or to get away for a few days - to relax and recharge their batteries. However, an attitude of "taking it easy" often reflects how we view challenges in our lives as well. Most people don't like difficulties and they probably don't like to subscribe to the notion that the sole purpose of this world is to face and overcome *nisyonos*. But this is exactly what the Mesilas Yesharim tells us. Hashem taught Yaakov Avinu this lesson when He challenged Yaakov with the *nisayon* of Yosef, all for the purpose of reminding him that he had to continue reaching higher levels of *shleimus*. Yaakov always looked at his *nisyonos* - whether it was working for an extra seven years for Rochel, or losing Yosef - as opportunities to serve Hashem. In the depth of the *nisayon*, therefore, Yaakov was working on staying honest in the face of Lavan's trickery and lies, and he succeeded in achieving *shleimus*. We also have to remind ourselves of this fact that we, too, don't want to just "rest" and "take it easy," but on the contrary, we want to face our battles to achieve *shleimus*. This coming week, I am going to look (bli neder) at one of my challenges as an opportunity to rise to an occasion, to accept it and to grow from it. I will remember the story of the Kotzker Rebbe, that Hashem wants me to bring Him into every aspect of my life, to push myself to the max in my davening and my learning, in my daily work, and to maximize my Avodas Hashem - because that's how ultimately Hashem wants me to serve Him.