

# Roadsigns, not roadblocks

Excerpted from the Teshuvah Within Reach guidebook



“Ein hadavar taluy elah bi.” We get it. We, and we alone, are totally responsible for our actions, no matter what life challenges we’d like to claim as excuses.

But... it just doesn’t seem fair. At the end of the day, our challenges are still challenges. They’re real, they’re painful, and they make it so much harder for us to do the right thing.

How can Hashem hold us to such high standards when He’s made it so extra-hard for us to reach them?

It’s a great question. To answer it, let’s ask ourselves another one:

What does hashgacha pratis (Divine providence) mean to us?

Many of us define it as the simple fact that everything that happens to us comes from Hashem. When good things happen, we know Whom to thank. When bad things happen, we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that He had a good reason for putting us through them. And one day, we might even learn that reason.

But there’s actually a bit more to it.

Hashgacha pratis isn’t just meant to be our passive reaction. It’s supposed to trigger an active response from us.

The Ramchal tells us (Derech Hashem 2:3) that Hashem gave every one of us a unique purpose in this world – a purpose no one but us can fulfill. How does He make sure we can get it done? He creates for each of us a unique “life-recipe,” packed with every ingredient and tool we need.

What goes into that recipe? Our personality, our upbringing, our circumstances, our strengths, our experiences...

And our challenges.

Every obstacle we meet, every source of pain in our lives, was custom-designed by Hashem to help us activate the unique greatness inside us.

Know anyone poor? Hashem might have made them that way, says the Ramchal, so they'd learn to be satisfied with the little He gave them. Know any billionaires? Maybe Hashem gave them their wealth so they'd learn to be givers.

It's almost funny. Those hardships that we use as excuses – Hashem gave them to us specifically so that we would do better in those areas!

He isn't asking us to grow despite our challenges. He wants us to grow because of them. We're used to thinking of challenges as roadblocks – boulders in our path that just make life hard. What if, instead, we could look at them as road signs? Because that's really what they are – markers that Hashem graciously stuck in our path to help us get to where we need to go.

We all have excuses.

“How can I be a respectful wife when my husband is such a schlemazel?”

“Of course I'm an angry parent, my kids are holy terrors!”

“I'll treat that coworker nicely when he learns to treat me nicely!”

That's all “**roadblock thinking.**” We don't want to be roadblock thinkers. We want to be **road sign thinkers.**

“My spouse's/child's/coworker's behavior really tries my patience. That must mean... that Hashem wants me to work on my patience!”

See the concept?

**Roadblock thinking:** How can I clear more time for Torah study? I'm barely making ends meet with the zillion hours that I work!

**Road sign thinking:** I'm finding it hard to make time in my day for another learning seder. Maybe Hashem wants me to appreciate that it's not all or nothing – an extra hour-long seder or no seder at all. Maybe He wants me to internalize that even a few short minutes of Torah learning hold immeasurable value.

**Roadblock thinking:** You say I'm too negative? With all the tough things in my life, you'd also be sourpuss!

**Road sign thinking:** I've got some rough things going on, and they make it hard to stay positive. Hashem must have put me in this situation so I could learn how to live b'simcha even when things are hard.

If you're a road sign thinker, you don't have excuses. You have a G-d who wants you to succeed, and fills your life with everything you need to make that happen.