

FINDING THE SILVER LINING

by Rabbi Elly Broch

"When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a tzoraas (1) affliction upon a house in the land of your possession." (Vayikra/Leviticus 13:33) Tzoraas manifested itself not only in the form of skin blemishes, but also affected clothes and houses in the form of discolorations. This, in certain situations, required burning of the garment or demolition of the entire house.

The Midrash expounds that although seemingly counterintuitive, this was good for the owner of the house. The heathen inhabitants who previously lived in the Land of Israel, before abandoning their homes, often concealed their money and possessions in the walls of their houses. Demolition of the house uncovered these treasures, allowing the new Jewish owner to benefit.

Yet the Talmud (Eruchin 16a) teaches that this plague came as a punishment for an individual's indiscretions. If G-d was castigating the wrongdoer, why was it orchestrated that the houses broken down as a punishment would yield treasures?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (2) explains that although the plague came to benefit the house owner with treasure, that objective was possible to achieve without going through the ordeal of destroying their house. The tzoraas experience was demanding and unpleasant, to alert the recipient of his wrongdoing and need for change. The plague worked to achieve both punishment and reward.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller (3) further elaborates that the Creator of the World, in His infinite wisdom, has a master plan that our finite human minds cannot fathom. This plan will materialize, and cannot be stopped or frustrated by our decisions and actions. Certain events are destined to occur regardless of our actions, but the sequence or details of the events may be manipulated to teach us a Divine lesson. G-d wished to benefit the house owner by exposing the treasure. At the same time, the individual made choices and committed sins punishable by tzoraas. The tzoraas was a punishment, causing the afflicted to repent and commit to a more spiritual life, while simultaneously fulfilling G-d's master plan with the discovery of the treasure. People often undergo some misfortune or suffering that appears on the surface to be a negative message from the Divine. However, later reflection upon the events brings the understanding that while they were difficult and challenging, they provided him with a fantastic opportunity for growth and development. The Torah is reminding us of the well known and much experienced axiom: what at the moment may seem like a punishment is, in reality, an opportunity and a treasure.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) an affliction that is commonly misidentified as leprosy; whereas leprosy is a medical condition, tzoraas is the physical manifestation of a spiritual deficiency, such as slander, arrogance and miserliness

(2) 1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/ Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century

(3) 1908-2001; a prolific author and popular speaker who specialized in mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) and Jewish history, Rabbi Miller commanded a worldwide following through his books and tapes: of the tens of thousands of Torah lectures he delivered, more than 2,000 were preserved on cassettes

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