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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

THIS CLOUD HAD A SILVER LINING!

PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

Once, Eliyahu HaNavi, the prophet, was met by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. Rabbi Yehoshua begged Eliyahu HaNavi to take him along on his journey. Eliyahu HaNavi agreed on the condition that Rabbi Yehoshua was not permitted to question his actions. They began their travels. Towards evening, they came to an old, shaky hut belonging to a poor couple. Both the man and his wife welcomed the strangers to their humble home, sharing their meager food and giving their own beds for their guests to rest. Their cow was their only valuable possession, for its milk was their sole source of income. In the morning, after thanking the kindly couple, Eliyahu HaNavi prayed that the couple's cow should die. It did. Rabbi Yehoshua was terribly shocked. He wanted to speak-up but remembered that he was not permitted to question Eliyahu HaNavi's actions. The next night, they came to a fine mansion and asked permission to spend the night there. The rich owner was not welcoming. After much begging by the travelers, he begrudgingly permitted them to stay in the barn with the animals. In the morning, Eliyahu HaNavi noticed a crumbling wall near the rich man's house. Eliyahu HaNavi fixed it so well that it would last for a long time. Rabbi Yehoshua was perplexed why Eliyahu HaNavi had done a favor for the unkind rich man. They continued their travels.

Yehoshua was perturbed by many of Eliyahu HaNavi's actions. Finally, Rabbi Yehoshua was no longer able to control himself. "It seems to me that you reward good with evil, and evil with good. Please explain to me your strange ways." Eliyahu HaNavi explained that the poor old couple who had treated them so nicely on the first night of our journey, certainly deserved their gratitude.

Eliyahu HaNavi saw that that the woman was destined to die that day. He prayed to Hashem that she should live, and that their cow should die in her place. "What about that rich miser, and his cracked wall?" Eliyahu answered, "There was a huge treasure buried beneath the wall. Had it collapsed, the miser would have found it and he did not deserve it. Before Eliyahu took leave of Rabbi Yehoshua, he told him that **people should not be disheartened when they see the wicked prosper, or the righteous suffer. For while man judges by the sight of his eyes, Hashem looks into the heart, and He rules the world with justice and mercy.**" (A Treasury of Judaism by Philip Birnbaum)

"When you will come into the land of Canaan that I will give to you for a possession, and I shall put the plague of tzora'as in the house of the land of your possession." (Vayikra 14:34)

Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to tell the Jews that when they enter the Land of Israel, their houses will be plagued by tzora'as. The tzora'as will be manifest by colors of deep green or deep red on the walls. If the tzora'as would remain for one week, then the stones which contained those colors would need to be removed from the house and would need to be taken outside the city. The mortar

on the house would need to be scraped clean and new stones would need to be put in its place. If the colors would return the following week, then the entire house would be demolished, and the stones would be taken outside the city.

Rashi and the **Ohr HaChaim** quoting the **Midrash Rabba** (Vayikra 17:6), explain that it was good news when the plague of "tzora'as" appeared on a person's home. How did the **Midrash** know that it was good news? The **Torah Temimah** elaborates on the **Ohr HaChaim's** explanation. When the Torah described the plague of tzora'as on a person's body it says, "When there is a plague of tzora'as on a person" (Vayikra 13:9). When the Torah described the plague of tzora'as on a person's clothing it says,

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“When there is a plague of *tzora’as* in a garment” (Vayikra 13:47). However, when describing the plague of *tzora’as* on a person’s house, the Torah changed the wording. It does not say, “When there is a plague of *tzora’as* on a person’s house”. Rather, it says, “וַתִּתֵּי”*”, that Hashem will put (give) the plague of tzora’as on the house.* The **Torah Temimah** continues that the word “וַתִּתֵּי” usually refers to Hashem giving something good: As in, “I [Hashem] will give rains in its time”, “I [Hashem] will give peace in the land”, “I [Hashem] will bring salvation to Zion.”

So, what was good about the fact that the house was demolished due to the plague of *tzora’as*?

Rashi and the **Ohr HaChaim** answer that during the whole 40 years that the Jews were in the desert, the Canaanites and Amorites concealed treasures of gold in the walls of their houses. They knew that the Jewish People would be entering the Land of Israel and would conquer it from them. They hid their treasures to prevent the Jews from finding them. When the Jews conquered the land, they found the hidden treasures only because their homes were demolished because of *tzora’as*. Thus, **the plague of *tzora’as* turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it resulted in the Jews becoming very rich.**

The **Sifsei Chachamim** asks, if so, what was the purpose of a plague of *tzora’as* in the case in which the *tzora’as* disappeared after one week? In that case, the home was not destroyed! Furthermore, according to the **Talmud** (Arachin 16A) it seems that the *tzora’as* was a punishment and not an act of kindness! The **Talmud** says that one of the causes of the plague of *tzora’as* was as a punishment for stinginess. A person would ask his neighbor to borrow some wheat. The neighbor would

reply, “I don’t have any.” A woman would ask her neighbor to borrow a strainer. The neighbor would reply, “I don’t have one.” As a punishment for this stinginess, Hashem brought the plague of *tzora’as* on the house. While the person was bringing out their possessions to prevent them from becoming *tamei*, impure, the people will see, and say, “Didn’t they say that they didn’t have what I had asked for? Look, they do have it!”

The **Sifsei Chachamim** bridges these two explanations, by saying that one question can answer the other. Certainly, the plague on the house came because of a transgression. However, Hashem graciously made it possible that sometimes good would come out of the punishment. Sometimes, the Jewish homeowner would find the hidden treasures.

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l (as quoted in Talelei Oros by Rabbi Yissacha Dov Rubin) offers a different answer. **Rav Moshe** zt”l questioned why sinners would be worthy of finding the hidden wealth. “How is it conceivable that specifically those who are guilty of stinginess are granted such reward?” Furthermore, “Why is their reward directly connected to the punishment that they receive because of their flawed character?!”

Rav Moshe zt”l answered that had the man not been a sinner, he would have discovered the treasures without having to break the walls of his house. However, when he finds the treasures only because he had sinned and had to destroy his house, it will be an embarrassment to him. That embarrassment will cause him to improve his ways, if only to avoid being placed into this position in the future.

Sometimes there is a “silver-lining in a dark cloud”.

What may appear to us to be bad may actually be the source of much blessing from Hashem in our lives.

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