

And I will place a tzaraas affliction upon a house in the land of your possession. (14:34)

Chazal teach that, when *Klal Yisrael* was informed that their homes in *Eretz Yisrael* would be visited with plagues, it was actually good news. Apparently, when the Emorites who had inhabited the Holy Land heard that the Jews were coming, they hid all of their treasures in the walls of the houses. For forty years, as the Jews sojourned in the wilderness, the Emorites occupied themselves with hiding their gold and silver, lest the Jews find them. Now, when a Jew acts in such a manner that he deserves that a plague be delivered upon his house, it will ultimately be destroyed, revealing the hidden treasures. In other words, the individual is first issued a warning concerning his behavior. Then, Hashem strikes his material assets, and, if the man does not take the hint, Hashem metes out His punishment on his body. Here, we have a unique situation in which the punishment is the catalyst for reward. How are we to understand this?

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, Shlita, explains that no person leaves this world without his designated dose of *yissurim*, troubles. He might go through “dry” spells where everything seems to be going his way. Sooner or later, however, something will surface to spoil the “fun.” The question is how one views the challenges, trials and tribulations which ruin his day. *Chazal* teach us a practical approach towards viewing *yissurim*, a positive perspective to adopt in life.

A man notes what seems to be a plague on the wall of his house. He summons the *Kohen*, who informs him that it be best that he remove everything from his house, lest it become *tamei*, impure. The man must leave his house, move into a motel and wait. The *Kohen* returns, looks at the plague, and notices that it appears to have spread. Removing a few bricks will not suffice. The malignancy has metastasized throughout the house. There is only one option: destroy the house. The man must be miserable. Try living in a cramped motel room with a family. The lack of comforts, the expense, can be overwhelming. All this, only to discover that, at the end of the day, he no longer has a house in which to live. Then, all of a sudden, he discovers gold! His entire attitude has changed. It has all been worth it.

Did it have to be this way? If Hashem had wanted to reward him, He could have given him the winning powerball ticket. That certainly would have been easier than waiting in a motel for a few weeks, not knowing what the next day would bring. *Rav Karlinstein* explains that Hashem wants to give this man a reward, but first, he has to pass the test of faith in Hashem. The Almighty subjects him to *yissurim*. How will he react? Will he rebel, or will he remain faithful, accepting, acquiescing to whatever Hashem throws at him? It has all been a test. If he fails the test, if every step of the way every time something goes wrong he complains, gives up hope, blames everyone and everything for his bad luck, then he has indicated that he reserved his faith in Hashem for happy times. When the going becomes rough, he is gone, his commitment has waned. Hashem will change the plague, so that the *Kohen* will purify the house. This will save the man’s house, but he will lose out on the treasure. He does not deserve it.

We cannot run away from challenge; trial and tribulation are integral parts of life. One receives a “grade” for passing a test. Without the test, there can be no grade. Avraham *Avinu* passed ten tests, emerging triumphant, thus earning a place as our nation’s Patriarch. Every great leader has his share of trials. These are the stepping stones in his ascension as leader. When a person observes the back of a needlepoint, he sees disheveled threads every which way. Nothing seems to be placed in an organized manner. Yet, when he turns it over, he sees a beautiful image, a multicolored mosaic which captivates him. Life is like that. In this world, we see the disheveled, non-sequentially laid-out threads. One day, we will be given the opportunity to look at the other side, filled with beauty and in perfect order.

In other words, a test/challenge, is an opportunity for growth. If one passes the test with flying colors, exhibiting his faith and commitment, despite being subject to pain and anxiety, he will be rewarded with incredible reward – often discovering the hidden treasure which has previously been unbeknownst --and otherwise elusive -- to him.

The name *Brisk* conjures up images of Torah eminence at the highest level. The *yeshivah* world has been totally transformed by the *Brisker derech*, analytical approach to study. One can say that no area of Torah erudition has not in some way been affected by the House of *Brisk*. The *z’chus*, merit, of serving as progenitor of this extraordinary Torah dynasty is awesome – especially since this individual started out neither as a *Rav* or as a *Rosh Yeshivah*, but as a G-d-fearing, Torah committed, wealthy layman.

In Willampole, a district of Kovno, there lived *Rav* Moshe Soloveitchik, a wealthy industrialist, who had inherited large hardwood forests from his parents. He entered into the lumber business, which, at the time, was quite profitable. Despite his great wealth, he never forgot his less-than-successful brethren; his home became a beacon for *tzedakah* and *chesed*, charity and kindness, to all who entered it. All went well until, one day, he made a bad investment. In the space of virtually overnight, he was transformed into a penniless person, who himself required *tzedakah* to support his mere existence.

When the richest man in the community suddenly became a pauper, the people were left dumbstruck. What was the reason for this Divine Justice? Why did such a good man become the victim of misfortune? **Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl**, convened a special *bais din*, court, to determine the cause of *Rav* Moshe’s sudden bankruptcy. After meticulous examination, it was determined that *Rav* Moshe had done one thing wrong. He had gone against *Chazal*’s teachings that one not give more than twenty percent of his fortune to charity. *Rav* Moshe gave far beyond the twenty percent. Although this was the decision rendered by the *bais din*, *Rav* Chaim could not reconcile himself to it. Thus, he left the matter hanging, waiting to see what would happen.

In the meantime, not having a business to attend to, *Rav* Moshe did not fall into deep depression (as many would do). He took out his *Gemorah* and sat and learned all day in the *bais hamedrash*. Slowly, hidden talents began to surface, and, in a short period of time, he became recognized as

an erudite Torah scholar. Eventually, he achieved the position of *Av Bais Din* of Kovno! Years went by, and he encouraged his sons to follow in his path by devoting their lives to Torah study and dissemination. They listened and became accomplished *talmidei chachamim*.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner commented, “Now I understand why *Rav* Moshe lost his fortune virtually overnight. His great acts of *tzedakah* earned a formidable reward: to sire a dynasty of extraordinary *talmidei chachamim*. Such a family finds it very challenging to achieve such an extreme level of erudition amid the material comforts that accompany wealth. Thus, he had to lose his money in order to pave the way for the dynasty of which he would be the progenitor.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik’s son, Yosef, married the daughter of *Rav* Chaim Volozhiner. After his father’s passing, he assumed the position of *Av Bais Din* of Kovno. He became sick shortly thereafter, leaving this world as a young man, passing the baton of leadership to his young son, Yitzchak Ze’ev. The young boy grew up and married his stepsister, Rivka Shapiro. Their son was Yosef Dov HaLevi, the famous *Bais HaLevi*. *Rav* Yitzchak Ze’ev chose to be the consummate *baal habayis*, lay person – an outstanding *talmid chacham*, as well as a dedicated public servant.

The rest is history. We must remember that this history was made possible only because, upon losing his fortune, *Rav* Moshe did not descend into a deep depression. Rather, he immersed himself in learning – accepting *Rashi*’s decree. It was his acquiescence that catalyzed the metamorphosis of Torah learning for all time.