

When you arrive in the land of Canaan... and I will place a tzaraas affliction upon a house in the land of your possession. (14:34)

A well-known *Rashi* teaches that the news concerning a plague of *tzaraas* appearing on one's house was to be taken with a grain of salt. While at first it seems tragic that one should suffer the loss of his home, there was a rewarding caveat to the destruction of the house. When the *Canaanim* heard of the impending arrival of the Jews into the land which they had inhabited, they hid their treasures in the walls, so that the Jews would not benefit from them. Now that the house was destroyed, the concealed places revealed all of the hidden treasure. The obvious question is: Did Hashem not have another means for enriching the Jews? Why was the vehicle of *negaim*, plagues, chosen to be their medium of reward?

Horav Yechiel Michel Epstein, zl, author of the *Aruch HaShulchan*, explains that this was by design. *David Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 119:71,72), "It was good for me that I was humbled (*uneisi*) so that I might learn Your laws. I prefer the teaching You proclaimed (*Toras Picha*) to thousands of gold and silver pieces." *Uneisi* is translated as humbled, but means the same as *ani*, poor man, so that when *Dovid Hamelech* is humbled/as a poor man, he is asserting that studying Torah is greater than owning thousands of silver and gold pieces. This makes sense if a wealthy man makes this declaration. He says all the money in the world does not come close to the satisfaction and eternal value of Torah study. David, the "poor man" cannot say this however – since he has never experienced wealth, having been humbled by poverty.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* explains that man can confront two diverse challenges: wealth; and poverty. Wealth is considered to be the more difficult challenge of the two, since wealth can lead a person to *kefirah*, apostasy, when he begins to believe that his material bounty is the result of *kochi v'otzem b'yadi*, "my power and the might of my hand." Poverty is different, since it engenders depression, but, at the end of the day, wealth, which can catalyze *kefirah*, is a greater source of spiritual anxiety.

Chazal in *Pirkei Avos* (4:9) say, "Anyone who maintains the Torah amid (despite) poverty will ultimately maintain the Torah amid wealth." Simply, this means that even if one is poor, he should be patient, because one day he will maintain the Torah amid wealth. We know this to be untrue, as many Torah scholars have lived in abject poverty all of their lives. The *Aruch HaShulchan* explains that *Chazal* are teaching us that one who succeeds in maintaining the Torah throughout the challenge of poverty, may be secure in the knowledge that he has the strength of character and commitment to Hashem that he can also overcome the challenge of maintaining the Torah amid wealth. It does not mean that he will become wealthy, only that wealth will not lead him away from Hashem. One who has failed the challenges brought on by poverty, however, will certainly not succeed in triumphing over the challenge of wealth.

This is the underlying meaning of the *pasuk*: “When you will come to the land of Canaan,” a nation of wealthy merchants, whose possessions are all destined to become yours, but who is to say/ensure that you are able to triumph over the challenges that are endemic to wealth? Therefore, “I will place a plague of *tzaraas* on the house.” When you see a quick end to your dreams and aspirations of material bounty, and you nonetheless withstand and overcome the challenge brought on by poverty and the humility it brings along, then you will be worthy of the wealth that will be discovered when you destroy your home. Now, after you have successfully navigated the test of poverty, you can go on to the test of wealth, with the knowledge that you are prepared to maintain the Torah and *mitzvos* amid wealth.