

When you arrive in the land of Canaan... and I will place a tzaraas affliction upon a house in the land of your possession... and behold, the affliction is in the walls of the house... the kohen shall command and they shall remove the stones that contain the affliction (14:34,37,40)

Chazal (*Vayikra Rabbah* 17:6) teach that, when the *Canaanim* heard *Klal Yisrael* was on their way to take their Heavenly-designated land, they hid their jewelry and precious metals inside the walls of their homes to prevent the Jews from finding them. Thus, when the house is demolished due to the plague, that is on it, the hidden jewelry will be discovered. Obviously, we can say a lot concerning *Hashem's* manner of rewarding the Jews. Surely, He must have a better, simpler way of giving them the gold and silver than having them dismantle their homes due to a plague. Let it suffice that it is all part of *Hashem's* plan. We will focus, instead, on the fact that we see from here that a person's home – the walls, bricks, and mortar, attest to the spiritual character of its inhabitants. Indeed, every person, when he "builds" his home, should take into consideration that the purpose of his home is for the furtherance and preservation of Torah and *mitzvos*. Thus, he will have positive "testimony" in his behalf.

When *Chazal* (*Taanis* 11Aa) state, "The walls of a person's home testify about him," they underscore the idea that a person's private life, as reflected within the walls of his home, reveals his true spiritual personality. While public actions may be performed outwardly, the true essence of a person's character is manifest in the privacy of his home, with family. It is in his home that each person reveals his essential persona.

The walls of a home witness everything that takes place within its environs. Is their home where Torah and *kedushah* reign supreme? Is the ensuing conversation characterized by positive encouragement and kindness? Is *Shabbos* a day of joy? The walls have all the answers, and they testify to what really takes place behind closed doors. A Jew's integrity does not only lie in how he interacts with others, but in how he deals with himself. Is he being honest with himself? Or is he a spiritual fraud?

Horav Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, zl, or, as the Torah world knows him, the *Pnei Yehoshua*, was a respected member of the Lemberg, Poland, community until 1702, when his life's trajectory suddenly changed. That year, he sustained terrible multiple injuries when a powder keg explosion caused a conflagration that took the lives of his wife, daughter, mother-in-law, and her father. They were among the thirty-six souls who were lost that day. The *Pnei Yehoshua* was twenty-two years old at the time. He was spared death, but only after lying on the ground, covered with the heavy beams which had once held up his house. As the *Pnei Yehoshua* lay there, he prayed to *Hashem*. He understood that, if things remained the way they were, his sojourn on earth would end very soon. He cried out: "If *Hashem* will be with me and take me out of this place to peace, and build for

me a faithful house, to increase its boundaries with students – I will not remove myself from the walls of the *bais hamedrash*. I will be diligent in Torah, studying its topics in *Shas* and *poskim*, and I will lodge in the depths of *Halachah*, even spending many nights on one issue.”

The *Pnei Yehoshua* became known for his great diligence and piety. It is recorded that, prior to undertaking to write his commentary, he studied the entire *Shas* thirty-six times! This corresponded to the thirty-six lives that were lost in the explosion. Indeed, the saintly *Chida* wrote: “I, the youth, merited to receive the face of the *Shechinah* in those days, and his appearance was that of an angel of G-d.”

By now, the reader must be wondering where am I going with all this. *Horav Yitzchok Zilberstein, Shlita*, quotes *Horav Yitzchak Kalmanowitz*, who rendered insight into the *Pnei Yehoshua*’s reaction to his predicament. When he lay there at the brink of death, with the heavy beams pressing down on him, it dawned on him that, perhaps, the beams were serving as Heavenly designated agents to convey a critical message to him. The beams which served as the witnesses, alluding to what transpires in a house, were telling him that he was not sufficiently diligent. Hashem did not want to take his life. Rather, He wanted him to wake up and use his time more wisely, not to allow a minute to pass without Torah. Every minute counts.

Sadly, we do not understand the value of every moment. *Rav Zilberstein* compares it to a hospital patient who is critically ill and every decision is life-impacting. The doctors and nurses are running back and forth, their eyes always on the machines that sustain their patient’s life. They are prepared, if necessary, to perform emergencies. Every decision is crucial-every minute paramount. This is how we should approach a life of Torah. We simply do not have minutes to waste. If Hashem has granted us that minute, it is for a reason and a purpose. If we would realize how much could be achieved in a minute, wasting it would be unthinkable.