



GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT METZORA

"Let prayer do the heavy lifting."
(Meaningful Minute)

The Promised Land

Abba Yudan was a tremendously kind and wealthy individual. All the tzedakah-collectors, when reaching his town, always made sure to visit Abba Yudan as their first stop. After some time, the wheel of fortune turned on Abba Yudan, and he lost all his money. His financial situation worsened to the point where collectors felt bad to approach him, and avoided running into him because they knew that he would give away the last few pennies he had left. One time, two messengers were collecting for a very worthy cause, and made sure to avoid Abba Yudan. When he found out about it, he tracked them down and forced them to tell him what they were raising funds for. They explained that it was for the marriage of two orphans, upon which Abba Yudan consulted with his wife. She suggested that they sell half of their last, remaining field and donate that sum, which is exactly what he did. The next morning, he went to plow the last remnant of his field, and during the work, his ox stumbled on something hard in the ground and broke its leg – another monetary loss he now incurred. When Abba Yudan went to examine the site of injury, he noticed that what the ox tripped on was actually a treasure chest earthed in the ground. He dug it out, and became wealthier than ever before. (Horayot, Yerushalmi)

Hashem warns the Jews in this week's Parsha that when they enter Eretz Yisrael, He may inflict the walls of their houses with *tzara'at*, and describes the procedure and sequence of events upon experiencing such a plague (see Vayikra 14:34). It required evacuating everything from the house, and in drastic cases even demolishing it to the ground. Rashi explains that G-d wasn't just "doomsday predicting" here, but rather giving them advance news that the current residents of the land were hiding their treasures inside and behind the walls and beams of their homes in great trepidation of the inevitable Jewish conquest of the land, and through the *tzara'at*, Jews would be forced to demolish the houses and thus uncover the incredible riches awaiting them.

One may be tempted to ask a very basic question: did G-d never hear of the lotto? Hashem doesn't have Zelle? Why did the riches have to come only after Abba Yudan had to go through various tribulations; why is the treasure found only after the house is decimated? Why couldn't Hashem just give the guy a scratch-off?!

R' Shlomo Farhi shared something profound in the name of R' Reuven Karlenstein. Although we generally view the travels through the desert in the context of a nation on a long journey in the wilderness, our Sages broaden the perspective as reflecting stories we find throughout many chapters of our own lives. We know that מעשה אבות סימן לבנים – the deeds of ancestors are a sign for their progeny. In other words, what parents plant, their children reap; what parents are, their children become. Thus, the journey in the desert wasn't just a distance that needed to be traversed from Egypt to Israel, but also demonstrative of the journey that a Jewish person takes in his lifetime to the "promised land" that one tries to get to – the perfection that one seeks and the goals that one moves towards.

Thus, when Hashem warned the Jews of *tzara'at* afflicting their homes in Israel, He was in essence also conveying a fundamental principle in life: the "promised land" also has problems. A single guy who feels lonely and is dating for a long time has all his sights set on getting married. Little might he realize that the "promised land" also has problems, and that marriage won't fix or solve all his dilemmas. Someone might be praying for his "dream job," only to later encounter a bad boss. Another individual, who finally got his long-awaited promotion, might now find himself dealing with bad employees. Even after a person is fortunate to move into his dream home, there can still be an annoying neighbor or other source of irritability. People mistakenly reason that once they graduate from one area or stage in life and move on to the next, everything will be perfect and all their issues will subside. To that, Hashem informs us that even when we enter the Promised Land, there will still be obstacles, and *tzara'at* might afflict the homes. Interestingly, the word "*tzara'at* / צרעת" is actually made up of two words: "*tzar et* – צר עת", which means an intense (lit. narrow) time. With anything good in life, there still comes a squeeze along with it, because a completely problem-free life doesn't really achieve much. Only through truly overcoming challenges does life become rich, impactful, and meaningful.

Despite the sad and perhaps upsetting reality of this problem-centric universe, it is actually not as gloomy as one might expect. G-d plants treasures in each of our own lives – treasures that are immense, valuable, and beautiful. The challenges that Boreh Olam sends along with it is there to reveal whether or not one is worthy of the treasures He planted. In the aforementioned story, will Abba Yudan scream and complain once the ox broke its leg? Will an individual speak *lashon hara* against the Holy Land after his house contracts *tzara'at*? If Hashem senses anger and negativity, He can ensure that the *tzara'at* will not spread to the rest of the house and that he never discovers the hidden riches. In our own lives, difficulties that arise aren't challenges; they are keys to unlock incredible treasures. The treasure might be financial bliss, or it might be growing in life and developing priceless skills or *middot* that would otherwise be unattainable. If we're too busy discarding these keys, though, we can never actually unlock the treasures that are beyond our wildest imaginations which await us, and all we're left with is bitterness and anxiety.

One can and even should pray to Hashem: "I know that everything You do is for my benefit, but please, it's a bit difficult, and I'm trying my best..." That's not complaining; that's praying – that renews and builds upon one's relationship with his Creator. Trials and tribulations are part of life – the question is how we deal with them. If we see in them an opportunity to uncover unbelievable things and handle them with creativity, energy, patience, and everything at our disposal, we merit to reveal gems...