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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

CONTENTS:

Part III. Many Pots of Gold - 16

Plagued Houses

3 / TORAS AVIGDOR . PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA . HIDDEN TREASURES

Today, if we find a stain or a certain growth on a wall, we just wash it off; and if washing doesn't do the job so we might scrape it off. But during the period when the Jewish nation was living on the land and conducting itself according to the Torah laws, you couldn't do that. You had to first bring the *kohen* over to your house and he had to view the *nega* and according to certain rules, if the color and its location on the walls were a certain way, he would declare it to be a certain fungi which is called *tzaraas*.

That was the beginning of the process because after a certain amount of time and under certain conditions – there was a procedure of waiting and watching, of studying how it spreads or doesn't spread – they go so far as to tear down the wall or even the entire home. That's what had to be done sometimes in order to fulfill the law of *negaim* according to the Torah.

The Secret Gift

Now there are very many details involved in *nigei batim* – those people who don't know about it won't learn much about it from my words now and those who do know about it don't need these words – but our point right now is something else.

Our Sages took note of an unusual word in our *possuk*: וְנָתַתִּי – *I will give leprosy in your homes*. Instead of “I will place leprosy” or “I will send leprosy,” the Torah says, “I will give you leprosy.”

And because of that small change, our Sages discovered a big lesson. “There's a secret hidden in that word *v'nosati*,” the Sages say, “because ‘to give’ implies a gift.” And so Hakadosh Baruch Hu is saying, “When you come into Eretz Canaan and move into the old Canaanite houses I'm going to give you *the gift of leprosy* on the walls of your homes.” That's what the Gemara says about *tzaraas*: בְּשׂוּרָה טוֹבָה נִתְּנָה לָהֶם – *The Jewish people were given good tidings here*, the good news that there's going to be a leprosy in some of their houses (Rashi *ibid.*).

Good news?! That there will be a *nega tzaraas* and you might have to move out of your home. And if the house is declared *tamei* and the *kohen* gives the fateful order, sometimes there's nothing to do except to knock down the house. And so with a heavy heart, you'll take a chisel

and a hammer and begin banging away. You know they had good heavy walls in those houses; walls that were built generations ago by the Canaanim. Not homes like in Flatbush that are wood with some stucco on top of it. No, they were solid stone walls made to last a thousand years. At least that's what he thought when he moved in; but now he sees he has to knock down the wall. He's tearing down his home! What kind of "good news" is that?! It's a tragedy, a disaster!

A Lucky "Break"

And so our Sages go on and tell us the end of the story; listen to what happens. As he starts dragging out the big pieces of chiseled stone from the wall – he's crying but he's a loyal Jew and so he fulfills the requirements of the Torah – he sees suddenly there's a big hollow there. A hollow in a thick wall? He's curious, so he takes a look and he can't believe his eyes. He sees something shining, glittering.

So he digs a little more and he finds there a whole stash of jewelry; diamonds and golden rings and bracelets. They were concealed in the wall, hidden there by the ancient inhabitants of the land. These were *their* walls before the Am Yisroel came into the land and they didn't have banks in those days where they could rent safe deposit boxes, so many people hid their valuables in their walls. And then, in their haste to escape when the Bnei Yisroel entered the land, they left over their hidden treasures.

And so it happens now that the proprietor who is mourning for the loss of his house discovers that in the walls there was hidden away a chest of treasures, a pot of gold.

Now, this Jew would have lived there forever without finding the treasure. In stone walls you would never discover what's hidden. And now this! "Ah," he says, "now I understand why the *nega tzaraas* came." He looks back and he understands why this misfortune occurred to him. Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent the leprosy to cause him to break down the walls in order that he should discover the hidden valuables.

And now, all his life he looks back with gratitude to that misfortune. If not for the leprosy on the walls of his house, he would have remained a poor man all his life. And now, he's wealthy! He could buy a new house

if he wants. He's able to support his sons-in-law in the *kollel*. So that's the *besurah tovah*, the good tidings that *nisbasrah l'Yisroel*. What he thought was a tragedy, ended up being a windfall.

Broken by the Business

Now, from this Gemara, from the plain *pshat*, it would seem that that is the purpose of all misfortunes. Every *tzarah* that comes on a person is a *besurah tovah*; every misfortune is a treasure chest. And to a great extent we do say that; we see it again and again. Like the man whose business was torpedoed. A true story – a man in my shul. He took a big order from a Stop and Shop store, a chain store. And he didn't know that this store was already a customer of someone else, someone in the mafia. By accident he took away a customer from the Italian mafia and so they came the next night and they firebombed his store. He's out of a job now. And he thought he was ruined. He was finished.

But the truth is that the business was breaking his health. His nerves were frayed and his heart was sick – he was sacrificing his life for the store. But now nothing was left so he went out of that business, and he went and got another job; a nine-to-five city job where his health was maintained. And he had time even to start learning. The man never learned Gemara before but as a result of the firebombing, he finally started learning Gemara. He became a *talmid chacham*, a *shtikel lamdan* too.

Like they used to say a joke, a *frum* joke: *חֲסוּרֵי מַחְסָרָא וְהֵכִי קֵתְנֵי* – A man lost his money and that's how he began learning. There are people like that; people who would have wasted their lives but their business went broke so they said, "Oh, forget it. I'll just let it go. I'll sit in a *kollel* someplace and I'll be *mistapek b'muat*." I know a man like that. And then he spent his life, a long happy life, learning Torah!

Broken Engagements

There are all kinds of ways that misfortunes turn out to be good later in life. What about that beautiful girl who was engaged to a doctor and everybody was so happy? It was *sasson v'simchah*, the culmination of the dreams of her family, that the daughter should marry a doctor.

And then the engagement was broken. His mother interfered and he called it off. Oh, you could imagine the tragedy in her home. A *yelalah* went out, an outcry. “Oy yoy yoy!” The family was sitting *shivah*. They had lost that golden *shidduch*.

But I know that this doctor happened to be a bum. I knew him. He was a very modern Orthodox man and a bum too and it was going to be trouble for her. And soon after the broken engagement there came along a wonderful young man, a *frumme ben Torah* who was making a good living in computers. It was a wonderful match! As a result of the ‘tragedy’ she was married to somebody else who was ten times as good and they lived happily ever after. She was saved from the doctor by this tragedy for which they were sitting *shivah*.

Of course, I’m not recommending breaking engagements, but many times in life we see *tzaros* have a benefit in this world. And looking back we see it was a stroke of good luck, that nothing better could have happened.

From Tragedy to Treasure

I recall a case of a *kollel* man, a *ben Torah*, with a beard, a *frum* young man, and he happened to be in a certain place where gentile boys came and annoyed him outside the door, outside the window. They were banging on the window and disturbing him.

This *kollel* man happened to be a husky fellow and hot tempered, the very strong type, so he ran out with the intention of doing something to them and they fled. And as he was pursuing them, he tripped on the concrete and he fell down and broke both of his arms!

I happened to meet him subsequently – I visited him and both his arms were in casts – and I told him it’s a stroke of good luck for him. Because he would have beaten them up and then their big brothers or their fathers would have come. And they might come with a weapon! So he got off easy, this fellow. The breaking of both arms, that’s the way that he was prevented from getting into trouble.

Thousands of Stories

If we study, if we look back, on very many of the misfortunes in our lives, we will see that they were blessings sent to prevent some later misfortune. There was a woman in our *kehillah* who crashed her car; she had a smash-up and so she had to go to the hospital for a checkup. And the physician discovered there was a lump on her breast and so they quickly made an operation and she's still alive; it's twenty years and she's well.

Now, I don't know if she realizes what a great blessing that crash was. Had it not happened, she would have perhaps postponed until it would have been past the time of healing. If someone had said "Mrs. so and so, what about going for a checkup?" she wouldn't have listened. Had she received a letter or maybe some friend would have told her, "Let's go," so she would have postponed. She never would have found it until it would have been too late. When finally Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent her the letter, the *tzarah*, she responded and she was saved.

Such things happen again and again. These stories are in the thousands only that we're lazy about thinking; we're not accustomed to looking back and seeing how Hakadosh Baruch Hu is rescuing us and helping us. But what the Chumash says here is that you *must* get accustomed to that. Because that's the great lesson of וְנָתַתִּי נֶגַע צָרָעַת – *I will give you a gift of tzaraas in your home*. It's the lesson of seeing the Hand of Hashem, how tragedy leads you to the treasure.

Part II. The Real Pot of Gold

A Wife's Reaction

Now when we hear this we get the impression that *tzaraas* is always going to be a telegram from OTB; a letter that you won the lottery. After all, *v'nosati* means Hashem is gifting us something; it seems that a house acquires the *nega* in order that you should find a chest of gold.

And so imagine now that a man and his wife came from the *midbar* to Eretz Yisroel, and now finally, for the first time in many years, they're permanently settled in a real home with stone walls. No more tents like

they lived in the Wilderness – now we have real walls. It's a great happiness to live in a home! And they expect to be there for the next five hundred years at least.

And all of a sudden after getting settled they discover that there is a *nega tzaraas* on the wall. *Tzaraas*! And so they're put out on the street and maybe they'll have to raze the whole house to the ground. And so the wife is frantic. "Chaim! What are we going to do with the kids?" She's wringing her hands! "Where are we going to live?"

The Wrong Reaction

So suppose he says, "Don't worry about it, dear. I remember Moshe Rabbeinu giving a *shiur*, a Torah lesson, in the Wilderness when we learned this parsha and he said that we'll discover gold in the walls. It's a *besurah tovah*."

Is that how a Jew is expected to react when he finds a *nega tzaraas* on the walls of his home?

Of course not! It's not that simple; not always were gold and silver found in the walls. Not every Canaanite had treasures; there were middle class Canaanites too – and even the wealthy Canaanite, maybe his wife was a high roller who squandered her husband's money and didn't leave anything to hide away. And so, as much as the lesson is true that sometimes what you imagined was a tragedy will lead you to a pot of gold, we have to understand it on a deeper level.

Chaim's House Clearing

And so our Sages tell us that finding treasure in the wall is far from the whole story. Because there's another Gemara that tells us something else. It's a Gemara in Eirechin (16b) and it says that a *nega tzaraas* comes upon a person because of certain sins that a person did.

It says there, for example, that sometimes *tzaraas* comes because of *tzaras ayin*, because he was stingy to help his neighbors. Neighbors sometimes needed to borrow something and he was tightfisted with his things. When his neighbor knocked on the door to borrow a hammer or a saw, he said, "I'm sorry. I don't have a hammer. I don't have a saw."

And that's one of the reasons why he has to carry out all of his stuff in the street. When a house becomes leprous the first thing the *kohen* has to do before he declares the house *tamei* is וְצָוָה הַכֹּהֵן וּפָנּוּ אֶת הַבַּיִת – the *kohen* first tells you that you have to bring out all the things from the house onto the sidewalk (14:36). That's the *din*; before the house is declared *tamei* you have to clear out the house.

And now all the neighbors are gathered to commiserate, to participate in the plight of their friend, and they're watching, and they see now the man carrying out his things. "Oh," they say, "look at this! Chaim *does* have a hammer! He said he has no hammer but he had one the whole time."

Then he carried out a saw. "He has a saw too! All these years he told me he didn't have any saw. We see he has a couple of saws." The neighbors are seeing he has everything! And poor Chaim, he was unmasked now; he understands right away that the *tzaraas* is coming to expose him, to punish him for being selfish.

Chaim's Tool Gemach

So we see now an entirely different reason why the *tzaraas* came onto this man's home; he's supposed to see that he's being punished for something.

That's what the Gemara (Brachos 5a) says about *tzaraas*, about all misfortunes: אִם רוֹאֶה אָדָם שְׁיִסּוּרִין בְּאֵין עָלָיו, if a man sees *tzaras* coming upon him, what should he do? He shouldn't say, "Baruch Hashem, it's for a good purpose." Certainly, it has a good purpose, but that's not enough; יִפְשֹׁפֶשׂ בְּמַעֲשָׁיו, he has to search his deeds. He has to say, "Why did Hashem do this to me?" And if he searches, he'll discover.

Among the things he'll discover is that he didn't lend his things. He had *tzaras ayin*; he was stingy with his things. That could be one of the things he'll discover. *Tzaraas* is a punishment. Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't allow a man to camouflage himself forever. It's a principle with Hakadosh Baruch Hu that sooner or later the truth will come out. A man can put up a front for some time but there's a policy of Hashem to make him known. And so we see from this that the purpose of *tzaraas* is to expose this man, to show that he's been

deceiving the people all these years. “I don’t have this,” “I don’t have that,” but actually he was just a stingy fellow who never worked on breaking the *middah* of being a *tzar ayin*. And now, because the *tzaraas* came, he’s embarrassed in front of all of his neighbors.

That’s an opportunity, a wake-up call. Hashem is knocking on the door trying to wake him up. Because as much as he was embarrassed now, shame in the Next World is even worse. And so he gets busy doing *teshuva*. He’ll become a lender of his tools from now on. He might even make a *gemach* for tools.

Clean Out the Dirt

And so, we see now that *tzaraas* is not so that he should find the pot of *gold* hidden within the walls. It’s so that he should find the pot of *dirt* hidden within the walls of his heart, *b’kiros libo*. That’s the real pot of gold a person can find in this world. And so we can equate both statements about *tzaraas* – the first statement, that the purpose of the *nega* was to find a concealed treasure, and the second, that it’s to find your hidden sins.

That’s what Rabbeinu Yonah tells us (2:2): “If as a result of a misfortune a man improves, then he should always look back to this time with the greatest joy *as if he had actually become wealthy as a result.*” That’s the pot of gold! There’s no greater stroke of good luck than if a misfortune happens and because of that a person stops a bad habit, he changes a bad trait. If he can make even a little bit of *teshuva* and change himself, so he found a great treasure.

Because that’s the greatest success a man can have in life. After all, what are we in this world for? To find hidden treasures? To collect ducats? To collect apartment houses? **בְּשַׁעַת פְּטִירָתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם** – *When a man has to go away from this world,* **אֵין מְלוֹיֵן לוֹ לֹא כֶסֶף וְלֹא זָהָב** – *his money and his property do not go with him.* **אֲלָא תוֹרָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים בְּלִבּוֹ** – *Only the Torah that he learned and the mitzvos and good deeds that he performed* (Avos 6:9). They’re the real wealth of a person.

How to React

And so, the good fortune is *before* you find the gold, when you’re worried about the *nega* on the wall and you’re thinking, “Why did

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Hashem bring this upon me?” If you’re searching out your ways, that’s the best fortune you could find; when you change, when you improve. There’s nothing in the world as valuable as getting better.

And that’s why in his Shaarei Teshuva when Rabbeinu Yonah introduces us to his program for making teshuva and he tells us that we have to look for incentives – as life goes by, day after day and season after season, people tend to relax into a lethargy and they fall behind in their program of accomplishment and so we need incentives – and so he gives us six opportunities which we could utilize as stimulants, as reminders to bestir ourselves and get busy and accomplish.

And *haderech harishon*, says the Shaarei Teshuva (2:2) – it means the first opportunity, the most important, the most common stimulus that we should utilize to get better is the following. In translation: “When there happens to a man some misfortune, he should take it to heart, and he should say, ‘This is *only* because of my own misdeeds.’” That’s how he should react to any misfortune that comes to him.

Higher Atheism

And that’s the great principle, a very important principle that’s neglected by almost everybody. It’s a way of life that was practiced by our forefathers from the very beginning of our history and it’s repeated again and again in the Torah. Throughout Jewish history it was always “אָנחנוּ פֶּשְׁעֵנוּ וְנִקְרִינוּ - We’re guilty”. “נִחַפְּשָׁה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנִחְקְרָה - Let us search out our ways and investigate our failures, let us return to Hashem”. Again and again, in the times of the Tanach, in the times of the Gemara, always, our forefathers only attributed their misfortune to their sins.

And that’s because they understood a great principle of our *emunah*; that there are no accidents in the world. That’s the first lesson a Jew has to learn: Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge! *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*, means He is the only One Who controls the affairs of the universe; whatever happens comes directly from Him. And if that’s the case, everything has a purpose.

You know, when a person attributes some happening merely to natural causes, it’s a sublimated form of atheism. Could be you’re a *frum* Jew – you have a beard and *peyos*, even a long coat, but there’s

something very important missing. You're missing the most important yesod that it's Hashem Who's doing everything!

Lower Atheism

You know, the textbooks try to ridicule the old generations; they say that the ancients were ignoramuses who attributed epidemics to acts of G-d. But now they're smarter, they imagine; they think they've progressed because the scientists today know that there are bacteria.

But that's only because they don't understand how the ancients thought. Everybody in the ancient world understood that Hakadosh Baruch Hu acts through agents. Whatever the agents are, that's a different story. Did they recognize precisely what the agents were, how they worked, I can't tell you. But they believed in agents then too; only they were looking behind the curtain at the One creating the agents, the One controlling the causes. And so you can be an up-to-date scientist and still understand that all the natural causes are agents of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And therefore even when a man is suffering even from an ordinary cold, if he wants to live according to the great principles of Judaism, he should feel what the Torah teaches him to feel: *"When a man sees misfortune coming on him, he should examine his deeds."* A cold is a messenger from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, absolutely.

Now what it's telling you exactly, that requires thought. Maybe it's telling you that you should wash your hands when you come in from the outside, from touching dirty doorknobs all day long; that you shouldn't put your fingers in your mouth. Could be. But whatever it is, the Torah Jew understands that the cold is sent for the purpose of bestirring him, of awakening him to search out his ways.

Suspect Yourself

And that's why when tzaraas came upon a man's house, he followed the old Jewish *derech* of suspecting himself, of blaming himself, of searching. "Maybe I have to remedy this fault and change this wrong habit." And he discovered; 'this thing is wrong' or 'that thing' and he became better because of that. Because if a person searches, if he looks

hard enough – a lot of people don't have to look hard at all – he's going to discover a pot of gold.

Now is it true that *only* because of their sins a misfortune comes? Absolutely not. Because we already learned about how leprosy came upon a house and the purpose was for the owner to discover a chest of gold; sometimes it happens that way. He might discover wealth; diamonds and gold and silver. Wealth is wealth! You can't ridicule wealth!

But the real chest of gold is what we're learning about here. That he becomes better because of that *nega* on his wall, that he searches out his ways and does *teshuva*. That's the *besurah tovah*. That's the real good news – the great wealth of perfection that comes from utilizing misfortune for *nachpesah deracheinu*, for searching in ourselves.

Part III. Many Pots of Gold

Suffering on the Trolley

Now this doesn't mean that some big catastrophe has to happen. It doesn't mean you have to wait for fungi to grow on your walls. Because the wise man will use every opportunity he can, even the smallest things, the most minimal misfortunes.

There's a Gemara in Eirechin (16b) that asks a question: עַד הֵיכָן תִּכְלִית יְסוּרִים – *How far is the limit of suffering?* Now, what kind of question is that? There's no limit to suffering – some people suffer tremendously.

But the Gemara means this: It's talking about the minimum. How much is already called suffering that you should take it as a hint to search out your ways? Does suffering have to be something big?

Let's say you get on a bus – this happened to my relative – he got on the bus, it was the trolley in those days, and he couldn't find any money to pay the fare. So he lost his head; he wouldn't get off. He didn't know what to do so he said to the conductor, "I'll write you a check." The conductor took him by his neck and threw him off. That's a real misfortune. He got hurt.

It happened to be that there was a lawyer on the trolley who said to him, "I'll take your case," and the lawyer eventually collected big money from the city for him. So even with that big misfortune, it turned out he found his pot of gold.

Suffering on the Bus

But suppose it's something much smaller than that. Suppose a man gets on the bus, and he *has* money. He *has* the 35 cents, only that he forgot in which pocket. And as he's reaching into his pockets the passenger behind him says, "Mister, let's go!" And he's a little bit embarrassed. So the Gemara in Eirechin says that even that is called *yissurim*. That little bit is called suffering. And if you look in the Gemara there you'll see other things, even smaller things, that are called suffering.

Now, for what purpose does the Gemara tell us that? Just to know? Just to be able to say over a piece of Gemara? We're taught this so that we should not regard even such minor incidents as accidents. Because אִם רוֹאֶה אָדָם שְׂיִסוּרִין בָּאֵין עָלָיו – if a man sees *yissurim* come upon him, יִפְשֹׁפֵשׂ בְּמַעֲשָׁיו – he has to search out his ways; and he must know that these little things are included in the *yissurim*; they are prods to wake him up from his stupor.

You have to be a big man to take a hint like that. It says, "A word to the wise is sufficient." *Dai lechakima beremiza*. Everybody knows what a *Kapula untzuherenish* is. Ever heard of a *Kapula untzuherenish*? It's called a *Kapula* hint.

Baffled in Kapula

A man in the city of *Kapula* once came to see a rich man and propose a business project. So the rich man said, "I'm not interested." But this small minded fellow kept on talking. The rich man was giving hints that he should leave, but he didn't listen.

Finally the rich man took him and threw him down the stairs. And as he's lying at the bottom of the stairs, he says "I *think* he wanted to get rid of me. I suppose he's not so interested in my business". That's called a *Kapula* hint. So if a man has to wait for a *Kapula* hint, it won't

be good. But a *chochom*, a wise man, takes the very first hint. And that's what the Gemara in Eirechin wants to tell you.

Now there are many small things that happen to us – every thinking person will see them in his or her own life. But at least a few examples we can talk about together; that way we train ourselves to practice up finding them and utilizing them to improve. That's how we're going to find the most important pot of gold.

Horsing Around at the Dentist

When you're sitting in a dentist chair, why should you sit there like a horse? A horse also sits in a dentist chair; veterinarians drill a horse's teeth too. That's not the way a Jew is supposed to sit. As a Jew sits in the chair and the dentist says, "Open wide," why not think it over? Why do you have to open wide? Maybe you opened wide some other time when you weren't supposed to?

And as the drill is going down and it hurts – whether it hurts much or it hurts a little – a wise person doesn't waste his life. He gets busy and thinks, "Why is he drilling in my mouth? Maybe it's because I open my mouth too much? I talk too much!"

Now naturally somebody will say, "Well, he didn't brush his teeth. He ate candy before he went to sleep and all that sweet stuff was twinging around his teeth during the night and rotting it away." But I know a relative of mine who hasn't brushed his teeth since he was born. I'm not recommending it by the way. You should brush your teeth every night. Everybody, boys and girls, men and women, should brush their teeth at least once before going to bed. No question that it's beneficial. But this relative of mine has never gone to the dentist and he never had a cavity.

Now it could happen that he was born with an especial kind of mouth. Could be. But we have to understand that whatever happens has two reasons. Besides the material reason, there is no question that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is at the controls. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't yield the control of the universe to bacteria. He's the boss over them too. And therefore whatever happens is a result of His decree.

Leaving the Dentist

And if a Jew understands that and he takes the message directly from Hakadosh Baruch Hu to his heart and he utilizes it, so he leaves the dentist's office not only with his cavity filled but also with a new resolve to change his ways. And that's the biggest achievement in life!

Even if only the first hour he'll keep his mind on his mouth; just for one hour after the leaving the dentist's office he won't talk — he won't talk period — he's a fortunate man. It's worth having a cruel fellow put a drill into your mouth and mine into your teeth just to remind you that for the next hour you shouldn't talk at all. Or for the next two hours you should be careful *what* you talk.

Inflation and Charity

And if you stick your hand in your pocket and instead of that quarter you needed, you find a hole in the lining, so don't be hard-hearted; don't be like an atheist and say "It just happened. I should have taken care of my lining." You *should* take care of your lining; certainly you shouldn't have a frayed pocket. But now that the quarter is gone, you have to think, "נִחַפְּשָׁה דְרָכֵינוּ." Maybe I was stingy when the poor man came to me. Why did I give him a measly quarter? What's a quarter nowadays? It's time to give him a raise. Everything has gone up and I'm still giving quarters. That's why the quarter left my pocket." And who found it now? Some unworthy fellow found it. What are you getting out of it now?

That's how a Jew should live. If while you're eating you give a good bite on your tongue, so instead of cussing, give a thought. "What's my tongue to blame? Maybe something is wrong with my tongue. Maybe I should have bitten my tongue instead of saying that to my wife this morning." נֶצֶר לְשׁוֹנְךָ מִרֵּעַ, *Guard your tongue against saying what you shouldn't.*

And so as we go through life, we grab these opportunities that Hashem is sending upon us. I recall once, I had just learned this idea during *mussar seder* and somebody told me, "There's a telephone call for you." So I left the *beis medrash* and was running to the phone booth. And the booth was very low so I banged my head against the top of the

door. And I actually saw stars. Once in my life I realized what it meant to see stars. I saw lights. But I was still fresh from the *mussar seder* so I had the presence of mind to think, “Ahh! That's what you deserve. That's what you get for running out of the *mussar seder*.”

Once in my life I was smart enough to take a hint. It just happened because I was in the midst of studying this subject so I made use of it. But that's how we should be *all* our lives; and life will be one steady procession of *tikun*, of growth, of improvement.

Fool's Gold

“Oh, that's silly,” somebody will say, a *chochom*. “I'm going to waste my life thinking about the things that happened, imputing them to sins which I don't know about? I should say that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is sending them upon me because of this or that? Maybe it's not because of that. It's so silly!”

The answer is it pays to be silly. If you'll discover a pot of gold, it pays to be silly. And there's no question you'll discover it. It could be it's not the true reason, but what's going to happen? The result is that you're going to become better! And that's what the Rabbeinu Yonah says. It's none of your business why Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent it. Your duty as a Jew is to attribute it to your own faults, and the result will be you'll become improved. That's what counts. And that's how you'll discover that chest of gold.

The Best Pot of Gold

The chest of gold is if a Jew learns to take a hint from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. So if you will make use of the opportunity, even if you won't guess the real reason, let's say you will blame yourself for something else that wasn't the real reason, but at least you will get the benefit – in one thing you will improve.

And to improve, that's what we're here for. Every Jew has to feel that his function in life is to become the best that he is capable of becoming. As long as he is given the opportunity – which means life; life means opportunity – then it's his function to seek to perfect himself more and more. It's only once in all history that we are given this opportunity so the wise person tries to utilize every little thing that

happens to him. Because as long as we have the opportunity, we strive for greater and greater improvement.

That's the wealth we should be aiming for, because that is *the* wealth of this world. That's what Rabbeinu Yonah says: וּבְאֶשֶׁר יִקְבֹּל הָאָדָם וְיִיטִיב דְּרָכָיו, אֶת מוֹסֵר הַשֵּׁם – When a man accepts the instruction of Hashem, וְיִמְעַלְלֵיו – and he will improve his ways or his deeds, רָאוּי לוֹ שֶׁיִּשְׂמַח בְּיִסּוּרָיו, – he should rejoice on his misfortunes, on his sufferings, כָּמוֹ כָּל שְׂאֵר הַהֲצָלָחוֹת – as on the great successes. Because that is the great success in this world; that's the real pot of gold, to come closer to Hashem!

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Let's Get Practical

Discovering Your Pot Of Gold

Life is an opportunity for improvement. Whenever something happens to us we trust that it's the best thing that could have happened. But the real best thing is when we improve ourselves. This week I will, *bli neder*, remember to think into whatever happens to me, big or small, and if I can use it as an opportunity for self-introspection and an incentive for self-improvement, I have struck gold.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

R-24 – Good Misfortune | **S-20** – Ways of Hashem | **433** – Benefit of Misfortune
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QUESTION

What's the proper Torah attitude to religious Zionism?

ANSWER

Now when this question is put in such a form, I must always say I don't know any proper Torah attitudes because I'm not an authority on Torah attitudes. But I'll just tell you my attitude; that's all I can tell you.

Religious Zionism means you're settling for 50/50. You're selling out partially. Because if you're religious, that covers everything. The Torah, it has all the idealism in it. If a man has to hyphenate his Torah and say, "It's nationalistic Torah," so this man is selling out partly. It means that he comes to the Basel Conference in Switzerland (*site of first Zionist Congress in 1897, where the World Zionist Organization was established*) and he sits there and they bring up on the program under Herzl's leadership that, "We are not going to make a religious nation, a religious state. We are independent of religion. We have nothing to do with religion." So let's say the religious Zionist voted against it, but they are still in the organization. They still belong and show loyalty to an organization that says the Torah is not the national flag of the Jewish people.

So it means they're settling for less. We cannot consent to be in an organization which says you can be a Jew without the Torah. You cannot be a Jew without the Torah! There are no two ways about it.

And therefore, there's no question that anybody who belongs to such an organization has sold out part of his ideals. It doesn't mean that he's a *rasha gamur*. He can still have a certain amount of *yiras Shomayim* and Torah, but there's no question that this man is lacking some very important elements of true and genuine Judaism.

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