

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

Sefer Vayikra The Markovitz Family Edition

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בעזה"ש

פרשת מצורע

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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Part I. Recognizing the Gifts

TZARA'AS IS A GIFT?!

“When you shall come to the land which I give you as a possession, וְנָתַתִּי נֹגַע צָרַעַת and I shall give a plague of leprosy upon a house of the land of your possession” (Metzora 14:34). In studying this *possuk* the *chachomim* took note of the word *nosati*, “I shall give to you.” “I will give” a plague instead of the more common, וְשָׂמַתִּי “I will place” implies a gift of sorts, and remarkably, that’s how *chazal* understood these words. “These are good tidings to them that plagues would come upon them”, the *chachomim* say.

Now, what good tidings could there be in a home that is contaminated with *tzara’as*, a home that has to be knocked down? So *chazal* tell us that upon hearing that the Am Yisroel was advancing towards them, the *Canaanim* had concealed their wealth; all of their gold and silver, in the walls of their houses (Vayikra Rabbah 17:6). And when the loyal Jew obeyed the law of *nig’ei battim*, and eventually he knocked down the walls as

commanded in this week's *parsha*, he discovered the wealth that had been hidden there all along.

And so, it was the *tzara'as* that Hashem had "given" to the owner of this house that became the bearer of good tidings. Because this family had possessed a great store of wealth in the walls of their home, only that they weren't aware of what they possessed. And it was only when the *tzara'as* came that they realized what a treasure they had in the home all along. The family might have lost a wall, and sometimes even the house in its entirety had to be demolished, but what they found in the process was a treasure that more than made up for the loss.

THE CASE OF THE MISSING GOLD

But you have to know that gold and silver were not always found. Not every *Canaanite* had treasures - there were middle class *Canaanites* too - and even the wealthy *Canaanite*, maybe his wife was a spendthrift, a high roller who squandered her husband's money and didn't leave anything to hide away. And even the ones who had extra gold and silver, not every one of them hid his treasure between the stones of his wall - some found better hiding places than that.

Now that's a question, because Hashem says *nosati*, "I am giving you a treasure when I send *tzara'as* on your home." And for many people, there were no treasures of gold and silver hiding in their walls. So what was the treasure for the family standing outside in the cold and rain, watching the walls of their house being demolished?

And so we'll say as follows: Even when no gold was found, the family gained an even greater wealth, because *they discovered the treasure of the home itself*. When a person discovers that there were opportunities available to him, that's when he has found the greatest treasure; the opportunities for greatness that he will now make use of for the rest of his life. And that's why Rabbi Yehuda, when explaining what gift was meant by *nosati*, "I will give you "a present" of *tzara'as*," didn't mention anything about a hidden treasure; he merely said: "These are good tidings that

plagues will come upon them” (Sifra *ibid*). He didn’t consider it necessary to add that they might discover hidden gold and silver because the treasure they discovered was even more important than that.

WHERE ARE WE SLEEPING TONIGHT?

The first and most obvious treasure that this family discovered was that *having a house is fun*. Did you ever think about that? Forced to stand outside of their home as the *kohen* went inside to inspect the walls, the father and mother huddled together with their children, and they looked back to consider that maybe they had not been grateful enough to Hashem for the blessings of a home, blessings that were now slipping out of their hands. And it was cold outside; it would rain too. “It was so much fun to have walls; why didn’t we appreciate it when we had it?! Where are we going to sleep tonight?” And so the forlorn family standing there were now discovering the treasure that they had always had hidden “in their walls”; the treasure of *having walls!* Of having a roof over their heads - *the treasure of having a home*.

And this lesson alone, to unearth that treasure of appreciating the walls of your home, that’s already enough of a reason for *tzara’as* to come onto a person’s walls. And that’s the lesson that we’re all expected to learn as we read the *parsha* - that we have to get busy appreciating the four walls of our homes and not wait for the lesson to be taught to us in the way it was taught to this family.

REMAINING A CHILD FOREVER

You know that a little child doesn't appreciate a home. He thinks of the street as wonderful, the sidewalk is wonderful - outside, that’s where the fun is. Try to bring a little boy back from the sidewalk into the house; you have to pull him with horses into the house. And most people never grow out of those childish ideas; they remain children all their lives unless they begin the work of thinking, of dilating on each benefit, and discovering the great treasure that the home is.

Walls are really fun! What would life be without walls?! You know that if not for the walls, the winds would be blowing all the time, and the rains would come pouring in as well! It would be very cold in the winter if all you had was a roof! You know that in this place we like the rain and the winds; we appreciate them to no end. But we appreciate them most happily from the window, standing on this side of the wall and looking out.

I was walking this week with a friend of mine and the snow was coming down. I was carrying an umbrella but he wasn't prepared, he didn't have an umbrella. So he said to me; he's one of my people, so he said, "Snow is like ice cream." I said, "You are correct, that's a wonderful idea but ice cream in your ears is not comfortable." We appreciate the snow, but we appreciate umbrellas too! So we'll stand on this side of the wall and we'll enjoy the rain and snow and cold. Of course, we enjoy it; but we don't have to dive into it.

SLEEPING ON OCEAN PARKWAY

And so you have to learn how to be happy that you have a roof over your head. Here's a poor woman, a homeless lady, a little bit demented; I see her pushing a shopping wagon on Ocean Parkway. All her possessions are in that shopping wagon; she has nothing. She doesn't have a bathroom, she doesn't have a kitchen, she doesn't have a bed to sleep in. Where does she go when it's raining? A pity on her. You see, she's bedraggled, it's *mamish* a heartbreak to look at her.

If she could only have a place to sleep. But she sits down on a bench, it's freezing weather, she's trying to get a nap on a bench; on a park bench she's trying to fall asleep. It's freezing and she can't warm up. And you, you have a house with a roof over your head! How lucky she would be if she could have a little place, a shack with a roof over her head; she'd be the happiest person right now. Even without any heat, she could lie down on the floor, at least, and sleep. She doesn't have even that. So first learn to enjoy a roof over your head. It takes a long time. A roof over your head, what a happiness that is!

FALLING OUT OF MY HOUSE

And privacy! Ah, the pleasure of privacy that walls afford us! Life would be no fun at all if your neighbor would always be peeking over from his dining room into yours; it would be a miserable home. And I'll tell you something else, and don't laugh: Without walls it would be so easy to fall out from the house into the street. Life in the home would always be full of danger; you'd be living precariously all the time. I think about that all the time when I see the walls in my house. And I don't live on the first floor; I live high up, so I enjoy my walls to no end.

Now when you begin to think like that, so you realize that walls are not just walls. There's a lot going on behind those walls. Plumbing pipes! Ah, a *simcha*! You have to tell your children the benefits of having running water in the house. When I went to Europe to learn in the yeshiva, the first thing that I noticed was that there was no running water in the house. You went out into the backyard, or a block away, where there was a well and you had to carry back a bucket of water with a yoke. It sat across my shoulders, one bucket hanging here and one bucket hanging there.

It was a hard job to bring water to the house. And then you poured it into some kind of contraption that was nailed to a wall; and when you wanted to wash your hands you had to bang underneath on the nail, a big nail, and if banged hard enough some water dripped down along the nail. And you had to keep on banging to get your hands wet. You banged and banged as you washed your hands, so little by little the water came out. Each time the nail went up, a little water came out.

TEA KETTLES AND BOOTS FOR THE BATHROOM

And hot water in the home?! Hot water too?! Who could have imagined such a luxury?! In Europe when you wanted to take a bath, there was no bath in the house. So either you went to the *schvitz baad*, the public bathhouse, or they brought in a tin tub. Some *balabatim* had a big tin tub, and they boiled up water in a tea kettle; one after the other they poured it in, until the tub was half full. Then you bathed in that water, in a room someplace, in a bedroom. So you bathed in a tin tub in water which was boiled in

tea kettles. When you got through with it, if you had a little brother, he bathed after you in the same water because they couldn't afford to fill it up twice. I saw it happen that way.

Nobody had a bathroom in the house! In the dead of winter, if you were unfortunate enough to get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, so you had to put on your boots. We had to put on our woolen boots and stomp through the deep snow to go to the so called bathroom, there was no fancy toilet seat. And whatever was there remained there, until finally in the summertime when it already had a big aroma. That's when a man with a horse and wagon came with a long wooden spade and he took it all out. And for miles around everybody knew what was going on that day, because of the fragrance that was wafted on the summer breeze.

THOMAS EDISON AT HAVDALAH

And you have lights in your home too, don't you? I remember when there were no electric lights; we had gas lights. And fires used to take place because of them. I once was in a house and there was a fire; the ceiling caught fire from the gas flame. I was watching the firemen trying to put out the fire. And in the streets I remember the lamp lighters used to go around with ladders and light the gas lamps in the street. Of course, today if you speak about electric lights to most Jewish children they'll laugh at you for appreciating such a thing; but that's because they're not being brought up as authentic Jews. An authentic Jew thanks Hashem for artificial light.

Actually we do it every week; people don't know that every week we thank Hashem for artificial light. Every day we thank Hashem for the natural light of the sun, *Yotzer Ha'meoros*, but for artificial light we thank once a week, on motzei Shabbos. *Borei me'orei ha'aish*. What's that? Did you ever think about that? We're thanking Hashem for artificial lights. Every week. Some people think it's just a ceremony, a *frumkeit*. No! We're *makir tov* for fire, electric lights, and all other forms of artificial illumination. After all, in the olden days when it was night time, what could you do? You could sit down and learn *ba'al peh* if you

remembered. But if you didn't remember you couldn't learn. And now, *boruch Hashem*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave us lights.

In 1879 Edison called together a company of scientists and he promised to show them a remarkable thing; for the first time in history an electric bulb was turned on, and they were amazed! They described it as if sunlight filled the room. There never had been such a light before! It's important to explain that to children; It's important to explain it to ourselves! To enjoy the light.

And therefore you should constantly be telling your children, "Look how lucky we are to have a nice home to live in! It's so much fun to have walls that keep us warm and dry and safe. Now the child might say, "What do you mean 'a nice home'? This place is tiny! My friend Sarah down the street has a better house than we do. They have such a big kitchen and a better this and better that." But you have to drown that out by constantly reiterating to your family all the benefits they are enjoying. They'll keep complaining and you keep talking about the *chasdei Hashem*. And it sinks in; trust me it goes into their heads. And that's the biggest *hatzalah* for the family, because it's the family that doesn't appreciate the *chesed* of a home, that's the home that the *negatzara'as* is bound to come upon, in order to teach them about the great treasure that a house is.

Part II. The True Treasure

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REPENTANCE

However, everything we've been speaking about is only scratching the surface of what the happiness of a home truly is; and it's only the first lesson that Hashem intended by the gift of *tzara'as* that a family finds on the walls of its home. Because when a family found themselves homeless, they were expected to understand that it was an opportunity for repentance. They were expected to understand that the tribulation of losing their home was intended as a punishment for not using their home properly.

Actually, a Jewish home is much more than the physical benefits of walls and a roof, much more than the blessings of privacy, shelter, plumbing, electricity and being protected from falling into the street. All of that is important, and it was the first and most obvious lesson that they learned. But it's still only part of the treasure that a home is. The aristocratic home of the *Am Hashem* is something much greater than four physical walls. And now when these walls are broken down, after such a drastic warning, this family was expected to exert themselves to begin to utilize the house as a place for *avodas Hashem*. What makes the Jewish home a true treasure is that it is the place where the *Am Yisroel* is built.

BUILDING THE BEIS YISROEL IN FLATBUSH

That's what our *Avos* and *Imahos* did - their career took place primarily in their tents. The Rambam says that: He writes that the sole intention of our *Avos* in everything that they did was לְהַעֲמִיד אֲמָהָהּ הָעוֹבְדֵת אֶת ה' - in order to establish a nation that would be servants of Hashem (Moreh Nevuchim 3:51). And therefore that's the job of the *Avos* and *Imahos* today as well; we walk in the footsteps of our forefathers and we continue to build the *Am Yisroel* in our homes.

And that is the greatest treasure, the greatest privilege, that could be afforded to anyone - the privilege of using the home for *avodas Hashem*. And it is that opportunity that was the great treasure that the family discovered when they were forced to leave their home. They were learning now that they had treated their home as just a place to live instead of a place of aristocracy, the palace that it really was meant to be. And that was the real treasure that they discovered by means of the *tzara'as*; and so when the family returned to their home again, they lived there with the knowledge of that treasure they had unearthed, and they were now ready to make use of it as intended by Hashem.

DON'T KICK OFF YOUR SHOES JUST YET

You know, when we think of a home so we might consider it possibly as a place of relaxation; the place you come back to after a day of toil in the workplace, where you had to act towards

people in an unnatural and artificial manner. And now you can come home and you can kick off your shoes, relax and behave naturally. Because your true career is in the home; it's in the home that you should be acting your best.

They tell about the old Telzer Rav, Rav Yosef Leib, that even in the hottest days of July and August - in those days they didn't have air conditioners and not even electric fans - and yet he never took off his *kapoteh* in his house. All summer he wore his long coat, because in his house, he behaved like a prince in a palace. Now, everybody knew that in the house that Telzer Rav sometimes had to take off his coat. He wasn't a *malach*; they knew he was a human being who couldn't be a Rav in his long coat twenty four hours a day. But no matter; he didn't want them to see him like that. Even for his wife and children he was always the Telzer Rav. He behaved like a prince in the home because he understood, and he wanted his family to understand, that the home is a palace, the place where the most important part of history was taking place - the building of the *umah ovedes es Hashem*.

Yisroel is a name that puts the Jew far above all of mankind; and that means that the home where the *Beis Yisroel* is being built is a place where there should always be an aura of aristocracy, a feeling that this home is a place of nobility, a place set aside for accomplishing the most important of all endeavors. And when a *Yisroel* tries to live up to this ideal of nobility so his behavior in the home is transformed. You know, it makes a big difference whether a man is a nobleman in his own esteem or whether he considers himself a commoner, a nothing. The things that a commoner will do, a noble man will not even consider. He can't be busy with novels and magazines - even Jewish magazines - that are filled with emptiness. He has more important things than that to accomplish, and so his mannerisms, his attitudes, and his aspirations are entirely different than the non aristocrat. The entire personality of a person is transformed when he realizes that he is a prince.

EMULATING THE ROYAL FAMILY

And when we live in a house where only princes live, so that house becomes something remarkable. Imagine there were princes who lived in a palace but because of some adversity they had to leave the palace. And now the princes, the royals, are living in a hut. But it's not an ordinary farmer's hut, it's not a shepherd's hut. It's a hut of princes now. Their manners are of princes, they spend their time in the way of princes. Even their speech is that of princes.

And therefore in a Jewish home it is of utmost importance to live up to the idea that we are *bnei melachim*. Before every move made in the home, they consult in their minds the model supplied by the awareness of their royalty; what they think royalty would do in such a case. A man and woman in the home should always be thinking: "What are the royal manners and the aristocratic ideals that should reign in the Jewish home?" Of course, we are all human beings and we can't imagine that we will succeed in one fell swoop, but we have to always be aware of the perfection we are striving for. And it is those homes where this is kept in mind always that will never have to be plagued by the warning and lessons of *tzara'as*.

THE JEWISH POLITICIAN

Now, in order to create an atmosphere of an aristocrat home, an institution where the *Am Yisroel* is being created, so a father and mother must appear before their children like actors on the stage. You can never be natural; no matter how you feel you must be to your children a hero. A politician, *l'havdil*, never appears in public acting like he really feels. He's knocked out; he's been traveling all night to get here after speaking someplace else. Now he's over here and he has to get up on the stage; sometimes he even has to speak at the train station as soon as he gets off the train. You can be sure that he's feeling grouchy and tired; all he wants to do is crawl into bed. Could be he's just been told by his campaign manager that he's trailing badly in the polls and that he's headed for defeat. No matter, he's waving and he's wreathed in smiles as if all is wonderful. He displays cheer and confidence; he needs votes, what could he do?

Now, a parent needs the votes of his children; he needs their votes to build the happy and successful home together and therefore he should always appear to them as confident; he always knows what to do. He's never desperate or worried. "Never mind," he tells his children with a smile, "Everything is under control; it's going to be just fine." He's always happy. What he's thinking inside, that's not their business.

You know the *gemara* says that a person should be *tocho k'baro*, his inside should be like his outside. Why doesn't the *gemara* say that his outside should be like his inside? *Chas v'shalom*, that his outside should be like his inside! "Be genuine," people say. No, if his outside would be like his inside, the home might become an Italian home, an Irish home. The ideal is that it should be *tocho k'baro*, his inside should be like his outside. The outside must always be good, only that the inside should attempt to follow the outside. But the outside always must be good!

MUSSAR FROM PRESIDENT REAGAN

You are the leader and leaders cannot be sad. A leader who shows sadness, who shows lack of confidence, is a failure. Even *l'havdil* President Reagan, no matter how much he was insulted, he kept his bearings. Even when he was shot in the assassination attempt, as they were taking him to the hospital, he made a wisecrack to show he was cheerful. That's because he knew how to act; President Reagan was a good president because he was a good actor. He didn't concede, he wouldn't admit that he had a setback.

A good leader, a good mother and father, won't show discouragement - they always maintain a good cheer. I'm not saying that you have to walk around with a big grin on your face, that's nothing; but an underlying appearance, a facade of confidence and cheer, are essential in the home of aristocracy. It doesn't pay for a leader to show discouragement; people don't want discouraged leaders. A prince is a man of confidence. And even when he doesn't have the confidence, he displays it in his demeanor and his countenance and in the way he talks, because the palace is too important for failure.

ON STAGE: QUEEN MOMMY

A mother should always appear like a queen before the children. Now, that's not easy, particularly when the children are in the house all day long. But it's not easy to be an actor; you have to go to one performance and then to another and then another. An actor would like to go home and kick off her shoes; to relax and lie down on the couch. But for glory you do it; or for money. So she appears on the stage each time like a shining queen. And that's how a mother should view herself in the home, like an actor on the great stage, putting on the most important performance of her life.

And therefore the ideal of aristocracy should be paramount when a couple builds a Jewish home. Not only should he consider his wife a queen and she should consider him a king, But they should consider *themselves* as kings and queens. And the children are princes and princesses. Always cheerful and confident and aware of their importance in building the Am Yisroel.

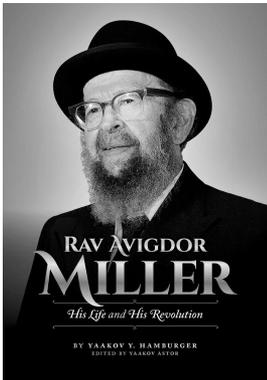
THE FIVE MINUTE MESIBAH

And it is that atmosphere that becomes the foundation for all the accomplishments of *avodas Hashem* in the Jewish home - the home becomes the place, not only of happiness, but of accomplishment. The "mundane" days of the week become days of accomplishing; Shabbos becomes a day of achieving greatness; *Yomtiv* is transformed into *avodas Hashem*. How important it is for parents to train their children in *simchas yomtiv*! Now some parents think that *simchas yomtiv* means taking out the children on *chol hamo'ed* for a ride to go to the park or the zoo. Nothing wrong, but that's *simcha*, not *simchas yomtiv*.

To train children, even little children, that today is *yomtiv*, today is *chol hamo'ed*, is so important for building the home. Sit down and make a little *mesibah*, even a five minute *mesibah l'kavod yomtiv*; a little gathering. Wednesday afternoon, Thursday, Friday afternoon. A little *mesibah* is more important than two hours in the Bronx Zoo or who knows where. A *goy* also has the Bronx Zoo, but we want to have an aristocratic home of princes and

princesses. Sit down and talk for a couple of minutes about *yomtiv*; tell the children, "Let's sing the song *Atah Bichartanu*, or a different niggun." And then say, suggest to them, "Kids, aren't we having a good time, *kinderlach?*" And they all chime in, "Yes. Now let's go to the zoo!" But that's excellent - you accomplished your mission! Because those few minutes have laid a foundation.

He made a special effort to create excitement for Shabbos and yamim tovim. He would do a little dance exclaim with gusto, "We're having such a good time!" "It's so much fun to have Yom Tov!" and "Shabbos is so much fun!" Grandchildren recall that when they came to visit on Yom Tov, he made a circle and danced a little jig, singing: "L'kavod Yom Tov, choo, choo, choo!"



When his children were young, he took them on Chol Hamo'ed trips, such as to the zoo, but first he would remind them that it was Yom Tov and that Yom Tov was so much fun. Then, with genuine enthusiasm, he pointed out the wonders of Hashem's creations.

He made his children a melaveh malkah filled with exciting antics and then served ice-cream which was a real treat in those days. He made a whole production out of it, especially when dividing up the portions, to make them excited. When putting out the pieces of chametz for bedikas chometz, he put a piece of chocolate in with each piece to make it exciting.

With his grandchildren as well he tried to make motzaei Shabbos fun. He had the grandchildren make a recording of themselves singing and then he played it back for them. He allotted fifteen minutes for this, and when the time was up he simply said, "Ah guteh voch," and went back to his learning. In his later years, on motzaei Shabbos, all the young children who lived nearby would go upstairs to his apartment, where he would give them each a dollar and prizes.

-Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and His Revolution p. 240-241

Part III. The Wise Woman

WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS

Now, when we talk about building a home, about creating a home that finds favor in the eyes of Hashem, we are reminded of the *possuk* in Mishlei (14:1): *בְּיָתֵהּ בְּנֵתָהּ בְּיָתֵהּ* - “The wise woman builds up her house”. You know, Dovid Hamelech said: *אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ בֶן אַמְתֶּךָ* - “I am Your servant Hashem, the son of your maidservant” (Tehillim 116:16). He didn't mention his father; his father was a great man, but Dovid said “I am your servant, *because* my mother was your maidservant.” You hear that?!

That's why one of the sages, Rabbi Yosi always called his wife: *בְּיָתֵי* - “My home,” because she's the one who really creates the home (Shabbos 118b); to a very great extent the success of a home depends on the atmosphere that is created by the mother in that home. Without her, the home is just a hollow shell, and she is the one who breathes the most success into the building of the *Beis Yisroel*.

HOME OF PRAYER

The home should be a place of *tefillah* and it is the mother who must present herself as the symbol of prayer, the model of *tefilah* for the Am Yisroel. Now, she can't stand and pray long prayers; she's busy with a lot of things in the house. But the mother must be a mother of prayer. Our mothers always prayed a great deal; a Jewish mother should pray even more than a man prays. Men have certain circumscribed duties and because of that, some of them, in order to discharge their duties, gallop through the *davenen*. It's just something that has to be done, so they do it. They gallop through a big *davening*. But Jewish mothers don't do that. A Jewish mother in the home should be turning to Hashem all day long. The old-time Jewish women had a handbook of prayers - prayers for everything, for every kind of eventuality. She would be praying for help in the home, that her supper should come out tasting delicious. Or for a child who is not well and for a child who is not going exactly on the straight path. Today too, a mother prays constantly that the washing machine shouldn't

break down, that her husband should earn a livelihood, that he should find favor in the eyes of his boss and get a raise.

So besides the fact that immediately, the first thing in the morning when the children wake up, they hear “Abba is davening in *shul*; Abba’s learning.” The children are always asking, “Did Totty come back from *shul* yet?” and the mother tells them, “Totty is in *shul* talking to Hashem; he’ll be home soon.” That’s how the Jewish home starts out every day, but besides for that, the mother spends the rest of the day absorbed in speaking to Hashem about everything. In the olden days the Jewish mother actually was a symbol of prayer even more than the husband; it’s something that’s forgotten today but that is one of the greatest achievements in a Jewish home. A Jewish mother should always be praying and the children who grow up with that know that their house is a home where Hashem resides. The aristocratic Jewish home actually became a *Beis Hamikdash*.

THE BRACHOS MASHGIACH

The Jewish home should be a place of saying *brachos*; all the *brachos* should be said out loud. Not long ago, it was the practice that when the family was about to eat, so they all washed, and the mother stood over them like a *mashgiach* in a *yeshiva* and she paid attention as each child made the *bracha* aloud, “*Al netilas yadayim*”; you could hear every word. And the mother said, “Amen.” And she had a watchful eye to see that nobody was cheating. And then they came to the table and each one had to make *hamotzi* and the words resounded on all sides; every child thanked Hashem for the little piece of bread in front of him. And they sat around the table like *kohanim* around the *mizbei’ach*.

When they live this way in the home, the children are raised with the understanding that they are living in something that’s more than four walls and a roof - they’re living in a palace and they begin to follow these principles.

THE FOOLISH WOMAN

And now we turn to the end of the *possuk*, חַכְמוֹת נָשִׁים בְּנִתָּהּ, “The wise woman spends her days building - וְאֵלֶּת - בְּיָתֶהּ,”

foolish woman, בְּיָדֶיהָ תִּהְרָסֶנּוּ, with her own hands she overthrows the house." No matter what ailment she is suffering, she must keep it to herself. Some people, usually women, but men too, think that if they constantly speak about what is bothering them it relieves them, they find relief. And it could be true, could be. But one thing is certain, it's not relieving the home. The atmosphere of nobility, the atmosphere of aristocratic cheer and confidence is undermined by sadness and complaining in the home; the husband shuns his complaining wife's company, and vica-versa when he complains, and the atmosphere of a place for achieving perfection is lost.

Never pessimism, never complaining. Complaining is one of the forms of breaking down a home. Even if there is no quarrel between husband and wife and even if the children are behaving and are loyal, if there is a complaining person in the house - if the mother or father complain frequently - then the morale in the house is broken. You cannot have a successful home, even a non-Jewish home, if there is complaining.

Nobody likes a complainer! And even though you feel you want sympathy, and you think that you deserve that they should lend their ears to your sighs and groans - and most probably you do deserve it - but you're not making your home successful.

THE JINGLE THAT RUINS THE NESHAMA

Suppose you wake up one morning and it's raining, sheets of rain are coming down from the sky, so the foolish mother complains "Oy, it's raining outside. It's terrible; I wanted to go out and now the rain spoiled all of our fun today." So little Chanaleh, whenever she sees a rain come down, she'll remember - without even thinking, she'll forget where it came from, but her instincts hark back to that pattern that was first molded on her young plastic *neshama*, and she knows that rain is a disappointment, it spoils everything. Here you have a mother standing by the window with her children, looking out at the rain. And the children are waiting for the rain to stop; they want to go out and play already. "Rain rain go away." They're singing that foolish

jingle. There are so many rainy days in life; isn't it a pity for the child to be molded in the wrong way?

If a mother could instill in her child the proper way to think; she says "Look Chanaleh, it's raining outside. Isn't that fun?" Chanaleh has no sense; she hasn't developed an attitude towards rain yet. So Chanaleh says, "Yes it's fun." Her mother is still the fountain of all wisdom and so she agrees with her mother. And now for the rest of her life rain is going to be fun!

This mother has the most wonderful opportunity. "*Kinderlach*, look at the beautiful rain coming down. Isn't it beautiful?! Isn't rain fun?! Hashem is sending us down all the food that we eat. It's apples and cherries and danishes coming down from the sky. Rain brings down all good things for us. Let's say together, "Thank You Hashem for the rain.'" Now the children might look at their mother with blank faces; Rain? Wonderful? But it sinks into their little heads that rain is beautiful; that Hashem is beautiful!

YOUR NEVER-ENDING ROLE

And so, no matter what the circumstances are, if a father and mother, a husband and wife, make it a principle always to display to each other and to the children a face of good cheer and confidence, then first of all they affect each other - they create in each other similar attitudes, and secondly they themselves become transformed.

What you're hearing now is of utmost importance. Always in the Jewish home there must reign an atmosphere of confidence and happiness. It's very important to always remember that you have the role of an actor; you can't be natural - being natural is not a *chochma*, and you need *chochma* to build up the house. It's easy to be sad, to be downcast. It's easy to let your feelings go and ruin the atmosphere. It's easy to be a failure.

Don't think that it doesn't have any effect! When you speak of Hashem in the home, when you constantly talk about Torah ideals, you're planting those ideals in their minds. Little by little you're changing your children. You're planting seeds in their

minds and as they grow older, they will water those seeds with their own wisdom. And when they're grown up, and they're tending a beautiful garden in their mind, a garden of Torah attitudes permeated with thoughts of Hashem, that's the garden that you planted so many years before with the words of your mouth.

But to be a success, needs planning. And don't think it's not going to repay you. The happiness, the satisfaction of a successful day in the house is a reward without end. It's a reward in this world and it's a reward forever and ever in Olam Haba.

THE TREASURE OF OPPORTUNITY

And so, the misfortune of a home that was afflicted with *tzara'as* on its walls actually became the great gift of knowledge, the understanding of what a treasure a Jewish home is for a family. *אֶת אֲבָנָיו וְנִתַּץ אֶת הַבַּיִת* - "And he shall break down the house, its stones and its timber and all the mortar of the house; *וְהוֹצִיא אֶל מְחוּץ לְעִיר, אֶל מְקוֹם טָמֵא* and he shall carry them out of the town into an unclean place" (Metzora 14:45). Although a family might discover a treasure trove that was hidden between the stones of the wall, that was only symbolic of the true treasure that he was expected to discover as they watched the walls of the house being torn down.

And that treasure is the awareness of what an opportunity a house is. The breaking down of the walls of a house is a tragedy of great proportions, but the greater tragedy is the breakdown of the Torah Home that had taken place there long before the *nega tzaraas* set in. The missed opportunities of *לְהַעֲמִיד אִמָּה הָעוֹבְדֵת אֶת הַשֵּׁם* in that home are what really tore down the walls of that home.

And as the homeowner and his family watch the physical destruction of the home, the lesson they are learning is the greatest treasure of all. Now they look back at the great happiness that the walls of the home afforded them, and which they failed to appreciate while they still possessed it. And you can be sure that it wasn't only this family that learned this lesson. When the house is

being torn down, and while the family stands outside watching and then begin to carry out of the city all the stone and wood that had once made up their home, all the neighbors watched in sadness and empathy, and if they were wise they also took the lesson to heart.

And certainly the lesson wasn't intended only for them, but even we today are expected to learn the eternal lessons of *nigei batim*. And the least that we can do is to remind ourselves constantly, day in and day out, of gratitude for the walls of our own home as well as for the superb institution of the home, the place where the Am Yisroel is being built. And the use of the home for *avodas Hashem* in countless ways is indeed the duty of gratitude which Hashem expects most; the home where parents and children understand its purpose becomes a place where the child learns optimism, confidence and happiness. And that's how he goes out to view the world for the rest of his life. And that's going to make him an *oved Hashem m'toch simcha* and he'll be *ma'arich yomim in happiness*.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

Should a husband spend extra money in order to make his house more beautiful if that will make his wife happier?

A:

If a man's wife wants to have a home that is more elegant and she wants to spend money on that – well, it depends. If he can persuade her not to be extravagant and that it's really nothing, then all right. But if she insists, then a certain amount of leeway he has to give to her. Certainly; after all it's a *chessed*. Doing *chessed* to your wife is a very important function of life. וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ. "You should love your fellowman like you love yourself." And your wife is your best fellowman! Certainly you should deal with your wife respectfully and spend – you should spend money as your wife's desire.

But of course, the wife herself must know that to be extravagant is not a big mitzvah – not at all! There are many very good uses to which that money can be put. And therefore, if the husband can persuade her with words of intelligence and *mussar*, that certainly would be the best thing. But they're going to have to reach some sort of compromise.

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