

## **“Finding the Hidden Treasures in Your Homes”**

**Metzora 5768**

**April 12, 2008**

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As many of you may know, we just returned from Israel. It was the first time Missy and I had traveled together to Israel without our children and this created a series of challenges. So, let me tell you about the one I had the greatest difficulty with. In fact, it bothered me for much of the trip. I wasn't concerned about their care because my parents were taking care of them and I survived their parenting. I wasn't concerned about how they would be getting to school, growing up I often went to school with my parents. I wasn't even nervous that if something went wrong my parents wouldn't know what to do, after all, Adi and Nina, our two oldest, are very capable and Adi drives. No, my greatest concern was bringing them back something they would like. It was, after all, one of the ways I got them to let go of my leg as we were leaving. We promised to bring them back a present. But what? Missy is really good at buying the perfect present for others. They are always thoughtful and appropriate. The gifts she gives are always right on target. I am not that talented but I am responsible, and this meant I would feel guilty until Missy bought them something. Of course we got them perfect gifts that they immediately love, gifts which made them really happy. In fact, they're really lucky to have their mother because if the task was left to me, they would have ended up with something that they either didn't like, or worse, that didn't fit.

This is probably why they invented the gift receipt in the first place. I'm sure someone in a marketing department said, "People will be more likely to buy a gift for someone if they know that person can return the gift when it doesn't fit or it's not their taste." A gift receipt is one step better than a gift certificate. A gift certificate acknowledges, "I have no idea what to get you." A gift receipt says, "I'm going to give this a shot but truth be told I'm not all that confident." When you buy something for someone and the salesperson asks if you would like a gift receipt, say yes because it's terrible to receive a gift that you don't appreciate and I'm sure the giver would want you to have something you want. That's why the greatest crime in gift-giving isn't re-gifting (when you give a gift to someone else that you received but did not want.) The worst crime in gift giving, one that has been perpetuated on me many times by some of my closest relatives is the crime of the decoy box. That is, when someone buys a gift and puts it in a box from another store, hoping the receiver will believe it's more expensive than it actually is. I know sometimes it's done without the premeditated forethought of deception and it's just a nice box. Maybe I ought not to be so cynical but I always wonder about the gifts I've received, because I think long and hard about the gifts I give and maybe I just spend too much time thinking. Maybe I should just spend more time appreciating the gifts I've received. Maybe we should all spend less time wondering about the motivations of others and just enjoy that which we have found in our lives. We have been given so much. We have hidden treasures in our own homes that go completely unnoticed and that's why leaving our children for 12 days, something we've never done before, gave me a true appreciation for the gifts I have, much more than anything else I have done. Leaving my home taught me about the treasures in my home.

Here are some treasures I've found in my home - maybe you can relate. I love dinner together as a family. I am warmed by Friday night lighting Shabbat candles together. I love watching the reflection of the fireplace in my children's eyes as they roast marshmallows in the fireplace. I love

the release I see in our children as I tuck them in their beds, scratch their backs, and say the *Shema*. I love the smell of my wife's hair as we sit on the couch or in bed and watch a movie. God, I am blessed and so are you. Those blessings fill our homes - and I would encourage you to take the time to figure it out.

If we can discover treasures in our homes and in our families, then we can discover treasures within ourselves, treasures that may have been overlooked or covered over. We all grow tired in our ever-demanding lives, often missing the parts of self that should be cherished. Have we lost our sense of humor or our ability to elicit and return love? Have we lost our kindness, our creativity? If you answered yes, then today is the day to find them. The Torah tells us that we can.

In this morning's reading, the words "gift" and "giving" find themselves as a focus. We immediately realize there are good gifts and gifts we wish we could return. Then there are the gifts we originally find of no value but ultimately come to mean so much more. In subtle foreshadowing of the prominence of this theme, the Torah alerts us that giving is central to our survival. When the person suffering from the illness described in the last 3 chapters of the Torah, teaches the Kohen, and gives that which he has received, *V'lakach HaKohen m'dam ha'asham v'natan* – the kohen receives and he gives. Giving is the action which brings the isolated and ill person back into the community. 12 verses later, the verb *natan*, to give, is used again to teach that just as giving is at the center of our lives, so too, it is central to God.

*"Ki Tavo el eretz kanaan asher ani noten lachem...v'natati negeh tzaraat*, When you enter the land of Canaan, which **I gave** you as a possession, **I will inflict** an eruptive plague upon every house in the land you possess." (Leviticus 14:34)

The midrash also comments that the Hebrew *v'natati* can also mean, "I will give," and according to some, this passage is a promise. The Canaanites hid treasures in the walls of their houses. "When Israel enters the land, God will send *tzra'at* upon these houses; they will have to be demolished and the Israelites will obtain the treasures." (Leviticus Rabbah 17:6)

What a strange construct of the Torah, to suggest that a physical structure could have an illness. Stranger too is the notion suggested by the midrash, that an illness can be thought of as a gift. Akin to a non-fatal car accident which can be a wake-up call in realigning priorities, so too, illness can help us gain perspective. Though we prefer, and sometimes keep, our priorities straight without a jarring life experience, often that is not the case. Conversely, sometimes the events which should help us find what is really important in our lives don't. Still, if we are open to re-evaluating our approach to life, we are given opportunities. In other words, life hands us opportunities to find out what is truly important for living purposeful, meaningful lives.

Life gives us gifts which often appear to be burdens, but placed in the context of a fully-lived life, they're really valuable. Though this midrash suggests there are hidden treasures in the physical structures of our houses, I am merely suggesting there are hidden treasures found in our houses and in our families and friends as well.

Now that I think about it, all of the gifts I just described really center on one gift - my family. It's not just that I love dinner together as a family, I just love being with my family and enjoying the

laughter that ensues. It's not that I'm warmed by lighting Shabbat candles together on Friday night; it's the soft little lips that kiss me, with the words "Good shabbos." It's not that I love watching the reflection of the fireplace in my children's eyes as they roast marshmallows in the fireplace; it's the safety we provide for them from the cold storms outside. It's not that I love tucking our children into their beds as I scratch their backs and say the Shema, it's the release I feel as they let go of their day and drift into restful sleep. It's not that I love the smell of my wife's hair as we sit on the couch or in bed watching a movie, it's that I love that her hair has grown back and she has been restored to health. Each treasure I've described has one thing at its core; the greatest treasure I have found in our home is our family. At the end of the day, no matter how hard it has been, no matter the disappointments or the challenges, at the end of the day we have each other. Though at times that may seem like a lot of yelling and chaos, I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Today I ask you to take this charge to heart. Discover and rediscover the treasures waiting to be uncovered in your houses and in your lives.

I never like to conclude a sermon without giving you a chance to make these words your own. Please join me on the inside cover of your Shabbat brochure and let's read together.