

LESSON IN A BOX



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Jorah Cafe



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HOLIDAY OF TUBSHVAT
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LESSON 3 // SERIES 3

THE SECRET OF THE TREE

Many years ago, when the Jews of Spain were persecuted because of their religion, there lived a famous surgeon, Abiathar Ibn Crescas. He was forced to give up his beautiful palace in Madrid and to give up his profession to seek refuge in a small village. Abiathar had a young son, Abraham. Abraham was happy that his father no longer had to travel to treat princes and noblemen but would be home to spend time together with him. Abiathar taught his son everything about the plants and trees in his orchard.

One day Abiathar called his son into the orchard. He said that it is a very special day for planting trees, Chamisha osor B'shvat-New Year for trees. It is a Rosh Hashana for the trees when G-d decides which tree will bear fruit, which will remain barren, and which will die. All we can do is work, plant and cultivate and hope for the best. On that particular Tu Bshvat Abraham planted his first apricot trees, twelve apricot seedlings. He would always remember his father's words, spoken seriously, when he said: "Abraham, promise me that you will always try to grow straight and pure, and be a good branch of the family of trees of our nation." It felt like his father was preparing him for something that was going to happen.

Then his father took him to the other side of the orchard where Abiathar had experimented with new and different kind of plants. "Abraham" he said, putting his arm around his shoulder, "I want you to remember what I am telling you. Should there ever be a time when you may have to leave home and I am not around then come to this spot. Dig out one of these plants, for it may be the key to your future." Abraham gave his father his solemn promise.

One stormy night, months later, a rider galloped up to their house inquiring for Abiathar Ibn Crescas, the man whom G-d gave the power to heal the sick. "I am the Duke Francesco Alba. My dear wife, the Duchess is dangerously ill. She requires immediate surgery to her throat which is swollen tight or she will surely die! No other physician is willing to undertake this dangerous operation so you must come. I will gladly give you half my wealth. I will have a ship waiting in the harbor to take you and your family away to safety."

Abiathar was reluctant since he no longer had permission to serve the sick. However, having no choice he finally agreed. "But you will have to promise me that should any harm befall

me, you will see that my dear son Abraham will be safe and cared for.”

The famous surgeon Abiathar Ibn Crescas had not lost his skill. The suffocating Duchess began to breathe evenly and easily once again. Abiathar, barely back home, was arrested by officers. Very shortly afterward, riders approached from the Duke to rescue the physician but they were too late. They insisted on taking Abraham with them to safety.

Abraham gathered a few personal belongings and was ready to leave, when he suddenly remembered his father’s words to him on that last New Year’s Day for Trees. He went to the far side of the orchard and gently dug up a plant, just as his father had told him. To his surprise he saw, down in the hole where the plant had been, a small metal box. Inside he found a pair of Tefillin carefully wrapped in waterproof packing, with a handwritten note from his father.

“These two things, my son, will go with you as you leave this place, perhaps to find a new home in a safer place, The Tefillin will give you strength to carry on in the faith of your fathers, which I have tried to teach you. And this plant, if planted in new soil and properly cared for as you know how, may be the key to great wealth. The seedling is from a far-distant country and it will feed silkworms which will produce precious material we now have to import from the Far East. Remain a good Jew, my beloved son, and G-d will surely bless your work and life with success. *Your loving father-Abiathar Ibn Crescas.*”

Abraham left with the Duke’s officers while at the same time Abiathar was being tortured by the cruel men of the Inquisition who tried in vain to get the physician to renege on his faith.

Months later, on the very same day of Abraham’s Bar Mitzvah, just as he was putting on his Tefillin, he beheld a small boat sailing into the harbor. He could hardly believe his eyes as he ran hysterically screaming to meet his father!

With time, Abiathar Ibn Crescas and his son Abraham gathered a group of Jews to join them and form a colony. They lived contentedly together, growing the trees which provided for them. On every Tu-Bshvat, Abiathar and his son planted a number of new trees, corresponding with Abraham’s age. They blessed the Almighty who sent them His blessing through the trees.

(This lesson In a Box was excerpted from the Talks and Tales Collection, Kehot.)

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