

occupy themselves with Torah, the Divine Presence dwells among them,"³⁵ there is a particular advantage when learning about Moshiach and the Redemption in public. Such public learning affects the excitement and the heart-felt joy through which comes an increasing desire and anticipation for the coming of Moshiach.³⁶

In addition -- and this is obviously most essential - one should increase the quality of one's observance of mitzvos; in particular one should enhance one's fulfillment of the mitzvah of tzedekah (comprehensive of all the mitzvos³⁷) with distinction, for it "draws near the Redemption."³⁸

It is proper and correct to connect the increase **in tzedekah** with an increase **in the Torah** concerning Moshiach and Redemption; by giving tzedekah with the **intention** to bring close and hasten the Redemption. This intention itself constitutes **learning Torah in matters of Redemption**. When one thinks of from time to time the saying of our Sages, of blessed memory, "great is tzedekah for it brings near the Redemption," it constitutes learning matters of Moshiach and Redemption.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Tazria-Metzora, 6 Iyar 5751)

35. *Avos* chapter 3, mishneh 6. See *Iggeres HaKodesh*, section 23.

36. Therefore, those who want to learn in depth, and in the give and take fashion of scholarly discourse (and to even contribute original Torah ideas about Moshiach and Redemption) in a quiet and peaceful setting, and therefore prefer to learn by themselves or with a partner, should still try (from time to time) to also join the learning of ten; this way they will also have the advantage of learning with ten (as mentioned in the text).

37. See *Tanya*, chapter 27.

38. *Bava Basra* 10a.

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Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Tazria-Metzora, 5783
(Vol. 27-28)



VAAD L'HAFOTZAS SICHOS
788 EASTERN PARKWAY • BROOKLYN, NY 11213
5783 • 2023

“5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL”

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
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 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
 Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
 ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
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 AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתחיל
Shagalov
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Printed in the U.S.A.

the Torah of our Rebbeim, our Leaders, and principally in the Torah (Ma'amarim and Likkutei Sichos³⁰) of the Leader of our generation. Learning this material is a sample of and preparation for learning the Torah of Moshiach, "For a new Torah shall go forth from Me,"³¹ meaning he will teach to all the people the Inner Teachings of the Torah (the reasons of the Torah) and knowledge of G-dliness ("know the G-d of your fathers"³²). This accords with the halachic ruling of the Rambam³³ that "in that time... the Jews will be great sages and know hidden matters, attaining knowledge of their Creator, etc."

This increase in learning the Torah concerned with Moshiach and Redemption ("Malchus sh'b'Tiferes") is the "straightforward path" to actually cause the revelation and coming of Moshiach and Redemption.

My intention here is action³⁴ - and certainly the following will be publicized everywhere:

In order to realize the immediate revelation and coming of Moshiach - each and every Jew (the men, whether they are dwellers in the tent (Yisachar) or men of business (Zevulun), and the women and children, each one according to his ability) should increase their learning of Torah, particularly the subjects of Moshiach and Redemption.

It would be even better if they would learn (in public) with ten others because, in addition to the advantage that "ten who sit and

beginning.

30. [Ma'amarim are discourses of Chassidic philosophy; Likkutei Sichos are collections of talks on the Torah and holidays. Translator's note.]

31. Yeshayahu 51:4. Vayikra Rabba chapter 13:3.

32. Divrei HaYamim 1 28:9.

33. The conclusion and completion of his work, the Mishneh Torah.

34. [Literally: "I have come for action." Translator's note.]

bring Moshiach through "**Malchus sh'b'Tiferes**"²⁵- can be understood in practical terms:

As a preface, since our righteous Moshiach is ready to come immediately, but he hasn't actually come, therefore the final effort required ("the edge of his clothes") of every Jew to bring Moshiach must be (not through Kingship in its purity, the concern of king Moshiach himself, but) through "**Malchus sh'b'Tiferes.**" That means, the subject of Moshiach (Kingship) as it is found in **Torah** (Harmony).

...Simply put: "Tiferes" refers to learning Torah, and "Malchus sh'b'Tiferes" refers to **learning the Torah concerning King Moshiach and Redemption** that are explained in many places.²⁶

These places are: the Written Torah (particularly "the words of the prophets... for all their books are filled with this matter"²⁷); the Oral Torah, in the Gemara (particularly the tractate Sanhedrin and the end of tractate Sotah) and in Midrashim; and especially the Inner Teachings of the Torah, beginning with the Zohar ("with this book of yours, the book of the Zohar, they will leave their exile in mercy"²⁸), through Toras Chassidus (that through the spreading of the wellsprings outward the master, king Moshiach, will come²⁹), to

25. [Literally, "*Kingship in Harmony.*" There are seven "emotional" Sefiros (emanations of G-dliness). These "character traits" such as kindness, severity or discipline, harmony, etc. are reflected in the individual's personality. Each of these also includes all the others. (There is a kindness within kindness, a discipline within kindness, etc.). Translator's note.]

26. They are easy to find - through indexes (which have proliferated in this generation), arranged alphabetically, in the appropriate entries: Redemption, Moshiach, etc.

27. Rambam, *Laws of Kings* chapter 11, halacha 2.

28. *Zohar* volume 3 124:2 - in *Raya Mehemna*. It is quoted and explained in *Igeres HaTeshuva* beginning of section 26.

29. *Igeres HaKodesh* of the Baal Shem Tov - *Keser Shem Tov* at the

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by

Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Tazria

THE HIDDEN HOLINESS

Tzara'as is an external blemish, a surface impurity that cannot be cured by one's own efforts. Hence, Moshiach is metaphorically called a metzora, one with tzara'as, for he will refine the "outermost edge" of the children of Israel. The tiny, out-of-the-way blemish we cannot reach on our own prevents the world from being a dwelling place for G-dliness. But Moshiach will do more than refine the negative; he will also reveal the positive. Tzara'as is the most extreme, most external manifestation of the attribute of Divine Judgment. It is the most physical form of the impulse to move inward and upward, to dissolve into G-dliness.

As mentioned previously, names signify the inner meaning of something. When two things share a name, we can expect some vital connection between them. This is true even if the name they share is a nickname or description, rather than their actual names. In a fascinating Talmudic passage, the rabbis propose a number of different names for Moshiach. While the suggested names often refer to the rabbi's teacher, each name also alludes to a particular characteristic of Moshiach.

In one such passage, the Sages declare Moshiach will be called "the metzora of Beis Rebbe." A metzora is one stricken with tzara'as, a spiritual condition that manifests itself as a skin disease, a blemish on the outer surface of an object or person. This assertion is based on a prophecy by Isaiah. Once Moshiach is recognized, he says, the Jewish people will declare, "Indeed he bore our illnesses and our pains – he carried them, yet we accounted him as plagued, smitten by G-d and oppressed." The word "plagued" technically refers to the plague of tzara'as. Hence the Talmud identifies Moshiach as a metzora, one plagued.

himself and brings honor from man." ...²⁰ This can be explained in light of what was previously said regarding the revelation and coming of Moshiach:

..."Rabbi said, which is the straightforward path that a man²¹ should choose for himself:"

"The man" - refers to "this man²² (who is 'at a high level... complete in everything') when his actions are proper and all things corrected... only the residue hasn't yet been cleaned from the edge of his clothes, etc." because of the exile - as was the case with Rebbe. In our generation - the last generation of exile, the footsteps of Moshiach, when we have concluded and completed all aspects of the service we had to do during the time of exile - it can be said that every Jew is at this level.

The question is: Since we've already completed "our actions and service throughout the duration of exile"²³ - what is the "**straightforward path**" (the easiest and fastest among all the paths of Torah) that all the Jewish people, who have concluded their service, should choose **to realize the revelation and coming of Moshiach**?²⁴

...The explanation of "the straightforward path" to reveal and

20. Avos chapter 2, mishneh 1.

21. [Literally, "the man," implying the ideal man. Translator's note.]

22. Likkutei Torah on our parsha, 22:2.

23. Tanya, beginning of chapter 37.

24. Beginning with the revelation and coming of **Moshiach within each and every Jew**, for it is known the verse, "A star will go forth from Yaakov, etc." that refers to *Melech HaMoshiach* (*Yerushalmi Taanis*, chapter 4, Halacha 5) also refers to each and every Jew (*Yerushalmi Ma'aser Sheni* chapter 4, Halacha 6), since in every Jew there is a spark of the soul of Moshiach (Me'or Aynaim, end of Parshas Pinchas).

long as the sun, may his name be perpetuated (Yinun)"; the School of Rabbi Chaninah said, Chaninah is his name, as it is written, "I will show you no favor;"¹⁴ others say Menachem ben Chizkiyahu¹⁵ is his name, as it is written, "for far from me is a comforter to revive my spirit."¹⁶

And we (Chassidim) follow their example¹⁷ (in regard to our Rebbeim, our leaders, in particular My sainted father-in-law, leader of our generation): Yosef is his name, as it is written¹⁸ "The L-rd will continue [Yosif] to apply His hand a second time, etc., and He shall gather the lost of Israel, etc." Yitzchak is his name, as it is written,¹⁹ "Then our mouths will be filled with laughter [s'chok]".

* * *

"Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] said, which is the straightforward path that a man should choose for himself? That which is honorable to

name" (and not that the students introduced the idea that his [Moshiach's] name is like that of their Rabbi).

14. [Literally, "I will not give you Chaninah." Translator's note.]

15. This is how it's written ("ben Chizkiyahu") in our editions, but in the *Yerushalmi* and *Eicha Rabbah*: just "Menachem. - Note that Rashi quotes the word "Menachem," and adds "ben Chizkiyah." It seems that Rashi's words should be amended thus: "The correct version is "ben Chizkiyahu, but the typesetter 'fixed' it and removed the words: "The correct version is..." This requires further study.

16. See also the *Yerushalmi Brochos* chapter 2, halacha 4. *Eichah Rabbah* 1:51. See *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak* on *Ma'amarei Razal*, p. 106, that "all the opinions are true and these and those are the words of the Living G-d." Note there. [The verse quoted literally reads: "Menachem the comforter of my soul is far from me." Translator's note.]

17. [The Rebbe here refers to the tradition of Chassidim to interpret the names of their Rebbe as a reference to Moshiach. This is in the tradition of the Talmudic sages. Translator's note]

18. *Yeshayhu* 11:11-12.

19. *Tehillim* 126:2. See *Brochos* 31a.

What characteristics do a *metzora* and Moshiach have in common?

First, we need to understand the nature of *tzara'as*, the plague which afflicts a *metzora*. The Torah defines *tzara'as* as follows: "When a man will have a rising or scab in the skin of his flesh, or a bright spot and it becomes in the skin of his flesh the plague of *tzara'as*, then he shall be brought to Aaron the kohen or one of his sons the kohanim." The plague of *tzara'as* appears on the skin – the outermost part of the person. Equally significant, it says "when a man . . ." using the word "*adam*" for "man," rather than the more common "*ish*." The Torah uses several names for a human being, depending on the context. The name "*adam*" as a general designation refers to Israel, the Jewish people at their highest.

Accordingly, *tzara'as* affects only an individual who has perfected himself, a Jew who has all but completed his Divine service. At that, it touches only the outermost aspect, the fringes, the most external or peripheral aspects of the person. Only the exterior edge needs refinement.

By and large, the Jewish people have already been purified through the long years of exile. Only the remnant, the outer layer remains unrefined. Moshiach has only to purify the external, the evil of the Jewish people that is only "skin-deep," so to speak. Therefore, he is called "*metzora*."

That Moshiach is called a *metzora* explains the length of the exile. The Jewish people, whose essence is holiness, has just about refined itself – and the world – through the Torah learned and mitzvos performed over the centuries. Still, there remain some peripheral imperfections or impurities. Although the *tzara'as* is only on the surface, its existence still renders the Jewish people – and the world – "impure" and incomplete. This is the task of Moshiach, to refine the "outermost edge" of the children of Israel. This also explains

why Isaiah says Moshiach will bear “our illnesses and our pains,” that tiny, out-of-the-way blemish we can not reach on our own. And that blemish prevents the world from being a dwelling place for G-dliness.

Still we may ask, what is the inner reason for associating the term *metzora* with Moshiach? At first glance, such an association is troubling, despite its metaphoric meaning. “Metzora” is a negative term, indicating one ritually impure and separated from the community. But the essence of Moshiach is Redemption – the rebuilding of the Temple and the ingathering of the exiles. Clearly, something of that essence must be reflected in the concept of *metzora*. Moshiach must be more than the one who purifies the transgressions of Israel; he must be the one who brings Redemption. Within “*metzora*” must be more than refinement of the negative; there must be revelation of the positive.

In simple terms, *tzara'as* represents a concealment of G-dliness. *Tzara'as* is the most severe form of ritual impurity. Ritual impurity occurs when there is a concealment of the inner, Divine life force.

When the Torah outlines the laws of *tzara'as* – how to identify it, how to treat it, etc., the kohen plays a pivotal role. An individual or object must be seen by a kohen before being designated as having *tzara'as*. Once cured, the individual cannot rejoin the community, cannot be considered ritually pure and able to enter the Sanctuary, until after a kohen-directed ceremony. The mere appearance of *tzara'as* does not make someone ritually impure. He must be declared so by the kohen. Until then, he remains in a state of holiness. *Tzara'as* does not become meaningful until the kohen recognizes it as such. Because of his spiritual nature, precisely a kohen had to declare a person a *metzora*.

Aaron was the embodiment of kindness; he was a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, and one who brought peace between a man and

(As the Gemara states,⁶ "Rav said, if he is from the living, he is like our holy Rebbe [Yehudah HaNasi]."⁷ [And then it states,] "**If Moshiach is from those that are living now** he is certainly **our holy Rebbe**,⁸ who bears the afflictions and is a complete Chasid."⁹) And he waits impatiently and longingly¹⁰ to reveal himself (from the concealment of the time and situation of exile), for the King Moshiach redeems Israel with the complete and true Redemption, after which there will be no exile, according to the halachic ruling of Rambam,¹¹ "If there arises a king from the house of David, etc."

...And there¹² (at the beginning of the discussion): "the School of Rabbi Shilah said, Shiloh is his name, as it is written, "until Shiloh comes"; the School of Rabbi Yannai said, Yinun is his name (similar to Yannai, [thus] each one explained the name of Moshiach after his name¹³), as it is written, "May his name endure forever, as

6. *Sanhedrin* 98b.

7. According to the legal decision of the Rambam (Laws of Kings end of chapter 11), "If a king from the House of David arises, etc." - means that he is already a king.

8. [In the Gemara, Rav is referring to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, compiler of the Mishneh and known simply as "Rebbe." Translator's note.]

9. The explanation of Rashi there. This is why Moshiach is referred to as "the leper of the house of **Rebbe**," "because of our holy Rebbe [Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi] who is called **Rebbe**... because he bore the afflictions and sufferings like him" (*Chidushei Agadah* of the *Maharsha* there). [The term "Chasid" here refers to one who is pious and kindly. Translator's note.]

10. Therefore "he loosens one and binds one (he loosens the bandage on one wound, cleans it and rebinds it, then loosens the next bandage, and proceeds thus; he does not loosen two wounds together (as do the others afflicted with illness among whom he sits). He says, if I am called, I won't be detained (If I am asked to go and redeem Israel, I won't detain myself in order to bind two wounds)" *Sanhedrin* there and *Rashi's* explanation.

11. As in note 5.

12. *Sanhedrin* there.

13. Rashi's explanation there. - And the wording of Rashi is precise: "each one explained [the name of Moshiach] after his

The Announcement Of The Redemption

22

In recent times we have spoken about and emphasized strongly the necessity for each and every Jew to do everything that depends on him to actually bring our righteous Moshiach immediately.

Since in these days (with the conclusion of the month of Nissan of the year "it will be a year in which I will show him wonders") **"all the appointed times have passed"** ("the end of Yamim (days)" and "the end of Yamin (days)"¹)² **in the simplest sense**,³ certainly our righteous Moshiach will come immediately. And [then] each and every one will point with his finger and say, **"Here he** (King Moshiach) **has come.**"⁴ This means that actually he already came in the moment before this one, for the past tense is used.⁵

* * *

Moshiach is found in the world in the time and place of exile, and in the situation of exile, for he bears the afflictions of the exile.

1. See *Or HaTorah*, beginning of *Parshas Mikeitz*. And further references there.

2. [The word for "days" in Hebrew can be spelled with either the letter "mem" or a "nun": "Yamim" or "Yamin". The former, "Yamim," is connected to the left, the end of exile and removal of the negative. The latter, "Yamin," is a phrase from the end of the Book of Daniel, connoting the right, and the revelation of the positive. Translator's note]

3. In addition to the fact that already, in the time of the Gemara "all the appointed times have passed" (Sanhedrin 97b).

4. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8 and *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on the verse (chapter 2:8(2)).

5. [In Hebrew, vowels are not usually written; rather they are understood either from the structure of the word, the grammar of the sentence or the context of the idea. Thus, in this case, the written form of the word for "come" can be read as present tense or past tense, depending on the pronunciation. Translator's note]

his neighbor and between a husband and wife. Kindness is the spiritual attribute primarily associated with the kohanim.

In Jewish mysticism, the opposite of kindness is judgment or force. *Tzara'as* is the most physical manifestation of this spiritual attribute, the extreme opposite of the kohen.

Kindness by its nature moves outward and downward, from above to below. It is expansive. Judgment or force by its nature moves inward and upward. It is restrictive. Mystically, kindness is an outpouring of revelation. The kohanim, through their service in the Temple and the priestly blessing, draw down a revelation of G-dliness.

But too much revelation can overwhelm and overpower. There must be a restraint of revelation, a limitation. This limitation is measured according to the recipient. It withholds an overwhelming outpouring of G-dliness, allowing the physical world to exist.

It is the impulse to move inward and upward – the attribute of Divine Judgment – that limits the impulse to move outward and downward – the attribute of Divine Kindness.

It also serves as a channel, so that G-dliness can descend into the physical. As creation becomes more physical, there has to be more concealment of the G-dliness that sustains it.

Once begun, however, the inner G-dliness can be so constrained that it descends to the level of *tzara'as*, a plague of impurity.

Tzara'as is a plague of the skin. It is the most extreme, most external manifestation of the attribute of Divine Judgment. It is the most physical form of the impulse to move inward and upward.

The spiritual *tzara'as* in man is the plague of desire, a longing to leave the restrictions of a body, to cleave to G-dliness with complete self-nullification and never return to the physical world. This is an impurity, the opposite of holiness. For G-d does not

desire expiration of the soul, but the service of “return.” The intent behind creation is that through Torah and mitzvos, G-dliness will be drawn into the world. The soul is to illuminate and be revealed within in a body.

In the physical world, that force may be so restricted and constrained as to appear negative. But it represents the potential for unbounded holiness. Thus Moshiach is called a metzora, for Moshiach will bring Redemption. Then the force of G-dliness will be fully and completely revealed within the physical. Then a holiness without boundaries or limitations will be revealed within the most mundane, material level.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 37:33-36)

break the walls of the houses, reveal the hidden treasures of G-dliness. By destroying the houses of idolatry, the previously concealed spiritual and material gold can be used to build a new house, the house of G-d, the Third *Beis HaMikdash*.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 27:107-115)

evil is nullified. Therefore, the essence of the transgression, the sinful act changes.

There is a remarkable implication to all this: every transgression contains within it an element of the permitted. Since *teshuvah* transforms, and *teshuvah* is a mitzvah, there must be an aspect of the permitted and holy within the prohibited and sinful.

Obviously, there is nothing remarkable about a case where a practical reparation is possible. For example, if one does not tithe properly, that mistake or oversight is easily corrected.

However, an act that violates G-d's Will remains a violation of G-d's Will. One cannot deliberately transgress a commandment and expect *teshuvah* to rectify the situation. Indeed, one who says, "I will sin and repent" is not given the opportunity to repent. Therefore the sin, the deliberate transgression, has no element of the permitted. It should remain essentially evil.

And yet, *teshuvah* affects not only the person, but the transgression itself. Remarkably, it causes a retroactive redemption. It transforms past evil, turning deliberate, willful sins and desecration into actual merits. Other transformations are conditional, and so always possessed the possibility of change from one state to another. For instance, a sale may be reversed because of a change in circumstances or failure to meet a condition. In this case, the altered status existed in potential from the start. *Teshuvah*, though, affects that which was not conditional, but at first was completely and irrevocably sinful.

A Jew can transform the past because he is in essence attached to G-d, who transcends the boundaries of time. A *teshuvah* from the depths of the heart calls forth that essence. The great love of a Jew for G-d places him beyond the confines of past, present and future. That which was can be transformed into that which should and will be.

In the natural order, man cannot purify himself from his *negai'im*, which is why the subject is divided between two portions. Purification comes through *teshuvah*. But the Jewish people, in a state of *teshuvah*, can

Metzora

RETROACTIVE REDEMPTION

The laws of negai'im, or plagues, are presented in two separate Torah readings. In Tazria, negai'im for a person are defined; in Metzora, the purification process of a person is described. Metzora also describes both the definition and the purification of negai'im for houses. Of all the possible impurities – obstructions to holiness – negai'im are the most severe. Nevertheless, the appearance of negai'im provides a unique opportunity for spiritual elevation – the chance to do teshuvah. The inner connection between the negai'im of houses and that of people is the retroactive redemption of teshuvah.

This week's Torah portion contains the laws of *negai'im*. *Negai'im*, translated as plagues or leprosy, actually are blemishes that appear on the skin, on clothes or on houses. These physical discolorations reveal a spiritual imperfection. The laws of *negai'im* apply only when the *Beis HaMikdash*, the Temple, is standing and the *kohanim* are offering sacrifices. Though not applicable now, these laws of *negai'im* will become a practical issue imminently, with the coming of *Moshiach*.

But, they must also have a current relevance. The inner, spiritual significance of any aspect of Torah remains eternally valid; this is true even when, for whatever reason, the physical expression of that significance is temporarily suspended. That we do not, for this brief moment, have a *Beis HaMikdash*, does not affect its value or importance. What was true before the destruction, and will be true after the rebuilding, must also be true now, during the exile and its last moments.

The laws of *negai'im* seem ordered in a peculiar manner. Last week's reading, *Tazria*, describes the appearance and dimensions of the *negai'im*, explaining which blemishes make a human being or clothing ritually impure. It also explains how to determine if the *negai'im* – the

so-called plagues – are still active, that is, when the person may be purified. But the purification process isn't discussed until this week's reading, Metzora. On the other hand, this week's portion also discusses **all** the details of *negai'im* in houses.

Thus, the laws of *negai'im* are structured as follows: in *Tazria*, *negai'im* for a person; in *Tazria*, *negai'im* for clothing and the purification therefrom; in Metzora, purification of a person from *negai'im*; in Metzora, *negai'im* for houses and the purification therefrom.

The laws of the human being are divided between the two Torah readings and separated by the laws of clothing. Since the laws for houses follow a person's purification ritual, we may conclude there is an inner connection between houses in general and the ritual purification of the person.

Now, the *negai'im* of houses have an unusual description: it says G-d Himself will place the *negai'im* on the houses. Two contradictory explanations are given for this: one is that the inhabitants hid their gold in the walls; breaking down the houses with *negai'im* revealed the gold. The other is that the idolatry of the Canaanites was so foul, it penetrated their very houses. To remove the loathsome spirit of idolatry, the houses that had to be destroyed were marked, as it were, with *negai'im*.

Of course, not all the houses had *negai'im* and not all of them were destroyed. As there are various levels of impurity, so the degree to which it penetrates an object varies. In most cases, simple acts which took possession of the house, such as putting up a mezuzah, sufficed to remove the impurity and remnant of idolatry. But sometimes the spirit of abomination is so deep it cannot be elevated without destroying its "housing." And yet, the "treasures of gold" are located precisely there.

This concept applies to *negai'im* in general: of all the possible impurities – obstructions to holiness – *negai'im* – the so-called plagues or leprosy – are the most severe. Nevertheless, the appearance of *negai'im* provides a unique opportunity for spiritual elevation. They are an unusual occurrence with a special purpose. A person is afflicted

with *negai'im* so that he will do *teshuvah*. When a Jew returns, removes the last vestige of his acts of impurity, he reveals the "treasure of gold" within his soul. A Baal *Teshuvah* – one who has repented – stands higher than a complete *tzaddik*. Thus, it turns out that *negai'im* – the severest form of impurity -initiate the highest elevation.

We can apply this idea to our own times and situation: the length and severity of the current exile surely is the harshest and most severe the Jewish people have experienced. It follows that, as with the person and houses afflicted with *negai'im*, there is a treasure of gold, the highest spiritual and physical elevation, hidden within the adversity. The highest levels of holiness inherent in man and the world, originally concealed, can be revealed only through the process of rectification, of *teshuvah*.

This indicates the intimate and integral connection between *teshuvah* and Redemption. As soon as there is *teshuvah*, there is Redemption. Further, the Sages declare that *teshuvah* motivated by love transforms deliberate transgressions into meritorious acts. Obviously, in the days of Moshiach, all Israel will achieve this status.

Still, there is a problem, echoed in the structure of the Torah readings. We must distinguish between the individual and the object, between the one afflicted and the affliction itself, between the person and the *negai'im*. Last week's reading, *Tazria*, dealt with the *negai'im*, while this week's reading, Metzora, deals with the purification of man. So *Teshuvah* purifies and elevates the individual, raising him to a level higher than the *tzaddik*. But, it seems, the deliberate transgressions remain transgressions. Things that are loathsome and impure remain so; the prohibited act remains forbidden.

We know from the prophets that the blemish and iniquity last only until the day when "death will be swallowed up forever," when Moshiach comes and the spirit of impurity will be removed forever. Still, we can anticipate the Redemption, foreshadow the coming of Moshiach, through a *teshuvah* so great that it transforms transgressions into merits. Not only is the individual elevated and purified, but the