

“Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house.” (14:35)

Otzar Chaim has a wonderful thought regarding the *teshuvah* process and how the *Kohen* or *rav* can achieve the greatest success with the sinner. In the *Mishnah Negaim* 2:3, *Chazal* state that in a house which is dark – and, therefore, difficult for the *Kohen* to see the *nega*, plague – we do not open the windows to increase the light and make the *nega* more accessible. We can derive a profound lesson from this *halachah*. It is a message to the *Kohanim*, *rabbanim*, and anyone whose function it is to rebuke, to reproach, to guide and mentor: Do not search for sins. Do not drive the sinner away by searching for more sins, by delving into the reason the person has sinned. If the sinner opens up on his own – fine, but do not depress him any more than necessary, because you will only succeed in turning him away.

A house that is dark, is analogous to the sinner who confesses to an indiscretion, but does not want to elaborate on it. Leave him alone. His confession is sufficient grounds for you to begin working with him, reaching out to him to bring him closer. Do not elaborate his sins; it will only distance him from continuing his *teshuvah*.

Then there is the flip-side: the *choteh*, sinner, who feels he has to unload himself of every sin that he has ever committed. The story is told that a *baal teshuvah* once came to *Horav Eliyahu Gutmacher, z.l.*, and asked him to prepare a *teshuvah* process for him. While *Rav Eliyahu* was perusing a *sefer* in an attempt to respond to the young man, the *baal teshuvah* began confessing his sins. He did not stop. He just kept enumerating sin after sin as if there were no end. *Rav Eliyahu* looked up from his *sefer* and said, “It is enough! You do not have to continue detailing your sins. I have one question, however, which bothers me as I listen to your litany of sins. What did Hashem do to you that provoked you to sin against Him so much?”

What a powerful and compelling question! We do it all the time. We sin – we repent – and we sin again. Do we ever wonder what our actions are doing to Hashem? In our smug arrogance, we only think of ourselves: Our sin, our *teshuvah*. We never think about the effect of our actions in Heaven. Hashem is a loving Father Who tolerates so much iniquity, but do we ever think about it from His point of view? What did He ever do to us that we should pay Him back in such a manner?