

"If a person will have on the skin of his flesh ..." (13:2) - If there shall be a tzaraas affliction in a garment." (13:47)

The *negaim* plagues mentioned in the *Torah* that strike man, his garments, or his home are not **physical**, communicable diseases. We note that **spiritual** affliction affects only Jews and not gentiles. Before the giving of the *Torah*, *negaim*, plagues, did not cause *tumah*. They are singular punishments for the sin of *lashon hara*, slander etc. The public castigation which the *metzora* must undergo seems to be inconsistent with the *Torah's* desire to maintain a sense of discretion regarding a Jew's iniquities. We find that the *Torah* creates discreet opportunities for the sinner to return from war, so that the real reason for his reluctance to face combat not be publicized. Why, then, is there no attempt at discretion regarding the slanderer? It seems that the public knowledge of the sin is an intrinsic part of his penance.

Horav Nissan Alpert, z.l., suggests that one who seeks to reveal another Jew's shortcomings publicly deserves to have his invidious act broadcast. Furthermore, in all likelihood, the slanderer puts on a show of "true friendship" when he is face to face with his victim. It is only "behind his back" that the slanderer's true colors are apparent. Such a malicious person must be unmasked, his nefarious deeds exposed.

The punishment of *negaim* strikes man's body, his clothes, and even his home. *Horav Alpert* suggests that each of these "plagues" responds to the slanderer's specific "ailment". There are people who are envious of their friend's "body," i.e. external appearance or outstanding personality. Consequently, these individuals seek ways to disparage their friend, subconsciously thinking that by denigrating this person, they elevate themselves. There are others whose envy runs more shallow. They are resentful of another's power and status. They are covetous of their friend's home, clothes, car, and possessions. Likewise, they defer to their petty jealousy by disparaging the other person, at times casting aspersion on the "source" of their wealth. Hashem expresses His discontent with these insecure individuals by striking their bodies, clothes, or homes. Measure for measure in accordance with their failing, they receive retribution.

Horav Alpert questions the fact that *nigei begadim* surface in all types of material -- wool, linen or even such unrefined material as unfinished skins. The parameters of envy would not seem to include the simple garments worn by a poor person. Why, then, are there *nigei begadim* on unfinished skins? *Horav Alpert* derives from this idea that jealousy knows no bounds. Even a single poor person can be envious of another person in similar financial straits. One can always "find" something to begrudge in his friend's possessions.