

When you arrive in the land of Canaan...And I will place a tzaraas affliction upon a house in the land of your possession. (14:34)

Rashi comments that actually this plague was beneficial, for the Amorim had hidden treasures of gold in the walls of their houses for the entire forty years that *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert. As a result of the leprous plague, the Jews were compelled to demolish the houses, exposing the hidden treasures. The question is obvious: Is there not an easier way to grant the Jews treasures other than requiring them to demolish their houses? Surely Hashem could have shined His beneficence upon them through another, less trying, avenue. What makes this more puzzling is that the *Talmud* in *Arachin 16a* states that afflictions comprise retribution for one's stinginess. Finding buried treasure in one's home does not seem like punishment!

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that punishment is relative. Had the owner of the house been a charitable man, he would have discovered this same treasure in a painless manner. Only because of his stinginess does he receive his due in such a way. While he deserves a reward for his good deeds, it is apparent that he was remiss in some area which warranted punishment. He must learn from the way he received his treasure that Hashem was displeased with some aspect of his behavior.

The **Aruch Ha'shulchan** and other commentators view this form of reward and punishment as indicative of the nature of all of Hashem's actions, regardless of what they may seem to be. The sufferings we undergo at times are for a purpose--to bring us closer to Hashem via *teshuvah*. Nothing that Hashem does is inappropriate. Even that which appears to be cruel and painful, is -- in reality -- for the good. When we suffer, we cry out to Hashem in anger or frustration. We demand to know why good people suffer affliction. What we do not realize is that good is hidden in every decree from Hashem. It might take some time till we recognize it, but it is definitely there. Nothing is bad--even the destruction of one's home. After awhile, we will all discover Hashem's hidden treasure beneath what seems to be destruction. May we merit that the day will arrive--soon.

The **Zohar Ha'kadosh** contends that the *Torah's* intention was not merely to benefit the Jewish people in a circuitous way. Indeed, if the underlying purpose was to discover the treasures, why does the *Torah* require us to obtain new stones and put them in place of the old ones in the process of rebuilding? Ostensibly, the intention is not merely to demolish the house, but rather, to eradicate any vestige of the old house, to abandon any element of its prior construction.

The *Zohar Ha'kadosh*, therefore, explains that in order to transform the *tumah*, impurity, of Canaan into the *kedushah* of *Eretz Yisrael*, it was essential to eliminate every area, even the innermost secret places, where *tumah* could have been harbored. A house which is permeated with a spiritual contaminant cannot simply be cleaned. It must be destroyed, and a new one built in its place. *Tumah* penetrates everywhere, contaminating everything in which it comes in contact. If one wants

to build an *Eretz Yisrael* that reflects *kedushah* and *taharah*, he must clear away any semblance of *tumah*, beginning over again on a foundation of sanctity and purity.

We may be so bold as to suggest that this applies to people as well. One who is prepared to change his lifestyle and adopt a *Torah* way of life must be prepared to abnegate his past behavior. In order for the sanctity of *Torah* to permeate a person, he must expunge himself of all impurity. *Teshuvah* is not simply a process of return; it is a complete process of rebirth and renewal.