

STORY

The gold we never knew existed!



After the end of World War II, the brilliant and flamboyant Torah sage, Rabbi Eliezer Silver visited and aided thousands of survivors in displaced persons camps in Germany and Poland who were waiting to find permanent homes.

One day, as he was handing out Siddurim (prayerbooks) and other Torah paraphernalia, a Jewish man flatly refused to accept any.

“After the way I saw Jews act in the camp, I don’t want to have any connection with religion!” Rabbi Silver asked him to explain what exactly had turned him off from Jewish practice.

“I saw a Jew who had a Siddur, yet he only allowed it to be used by the inmates in exchange for their daily bread ration. Imagine,” he sneered, “a Jew selling the right to daven for bread!”

“And how many customers did this man get?” inquired Rabbi Silver. “Far too many!” snapped the man.

Rabbi Silver put his hand around the gentlemen and gently explained. “Why are you looking at the bad Jew who sold the right to pray? Why don’t you look at the many good Jews who were willing to forego their rations and starve, just in order to pray? Isn’t that the lesson you should take with you?”

In this week’s Parsha, Rashi tells us that the first stage of *tzora’as* — the home — is actually a blessing in disguise. *Tzora’as* on a home can indeed bring fortune to the affected.

As the Israelites were approaching the Land of *Canaan*, the inhabitants, figuring that one day they would re-conquer the land, hid all their gold and silver inside the walls of their homes. When one dislodged the afflicted stones of his home he would find the hidden treasures that were left by the fleeing Canaanites.

It is troubling. Why should the first warning of *tzora’as* reek of triumph? What message is Hashem sending to the first offender by rewarding his misdeeds with a cache of gold? What spiritual import is gained from the materialistic discovery?

Perhaps Hashem in His compassion is sending much more to the sinner than a get-rich-quick scheme. He shows the first-time offender to look a little deeper.

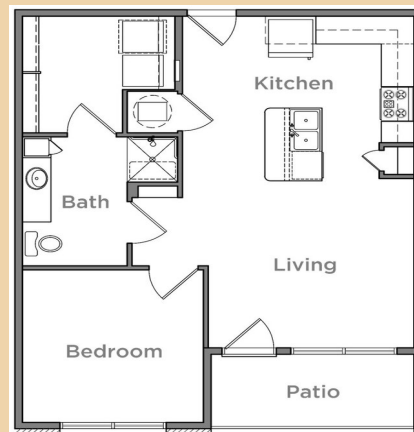
On the outside he may see a dirty wall of a former Canaanite home. Dig a little deeper and you will find gold in the walls.

We often look at ourselves as “dirty” or unworthy of kedusha due to our past failings. This, in turn, leads to despair and lack of motivation. But sometimes we have to break down our walls to find the gold we never knew existed!

**SMILE!
IT'S CONTAGIOUS**



Looking at the map for weekend travel ideas...



The rabbi was angry about the amount of money his congregants were giving to charity. He prayed that the rich should give more charity to the poor. “And has your prayer been answered?” asked his wife. “Half of it was,” replied the rabbi. “The poor are willing to accept the money.”



At the funeral of the richest man in town, a stranger saw a woman crying very loudly. The stranger said, “Are you a relative of the deceased?” “No.” “Then why are you crying?” “That’s why!”



Two men of Chelm went out for a walk, when suddenly it began to rain. “Quick,” said one. “Open your umbrella.” “It won’t help,” said his friend. “My umbrella is full of holes.” “Then why did you bring it?” “I didn’t think it would rain!”

FOR THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH SHMIRAS EINAYIM. NOW IS HARDER THAN EVER!

Being confined to home without work, feeling anxious and stressed, as well as constantly checking our computers and phones, are breeding grounds for the Yetzer Hara.

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Metzora Confinement; Self-Improvement

There is a classic tale of the gentleman who purchased a plane ticket from New York to Los Angeles. The man was quite finicky about traveling, and asked the agent for a window seat. Somehow, he was not placed by the window, rather in the aisle.

During the entire trip, he fidgeted and squirmed. Immediately after the long journey the man went straight to complain. "I specifically asked for a window seat," he exclaimed. "Your agent in New York assured me that I would be getting a window seat. Look at this stub. It placed me right in the aisle!"

The customer relations agent in Los Angeles was not fazed. Unfazed she asked the man, "Did you ask the person in the window seat to trade places?" This time the man was irate. "I was not able to!" "And why not?" "There was no one in the seat."

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, in his classic work *Emes L'Yaakov* explains. People often blame the ramifications of their doings on everyone else but themselves. Truth be told, a *Metzora* could have circumvented confinement by not reporting the *negah* to the *Kohen*, or even by pulling out the hairs that were discolored. This is akin to a man who is sentenced to house imprisonment. His hands are tied together with the rope attached to his own teeth. He is told to watch himself and not escape.

In essence, a *negah* is merely a Divine wake-up-call. It is heaven's way of letting an individual know that there is something wrong. It is a personal message and must be taken personally. And so in solitude, the man sits and ponders what exactly needs correction.

In these days of Covid-19, in some way we're like a *Metzora*, stuck in isolation. Hashem is giving us the opportunity to look inward and improve ourselves without the barriers of false flattery and social mendacity. This is an opportune time for real growth and inner change.

Admitted to Hashem...

The Torah says that if a person develops a skin lesion which may be *tzoraas*, he must show it to the *kohain*.

The Rebbe of Stolin said, "How different the chassidim of today are from those of the previous generation. Today's chassidim try to show the Rebbe how pious and observant they are. When I used to go to my Rebbe, I would show him all my defects, in the hope that he could help me divest myself of them." When we take a garment to be cleaned, we may call the attention of the cleaner to those stains that we think are most resistant, alerting him to be particularly certain that they are removed. How foolish it would be to conceal these stains from the cleaner's eyes!

In the sensitive area of *Kedusha* and *shmiras einayim*, we are very reluctant to open up about our struggle. But sometimes, the most powerful tool to breaking free of bad habits is to share our struggles with our spiritual leaders, or even with a good friend.

Who, me??

In this week's Parsha we find the *dinim* of *nega'im* in all their details. In the process of the Tahara for a *mitzora*, we find that the person must bring two doves, a piece of cedar wood and some 'ezov' grass.

We are all familiar with the concept that the haughty person who is like a tall cedar, must lower himself to be humble as the 'Ezov' grass. Reb Henschel of Alexander Ztl gives it a little twist and says that the cedar and ezov also symbolize how sometimes the falsely humble person MUST RAISE HIMSELF UP LIKE A CEDAR!! How profound!!

In our struggle, the Yetzer Hara's greatest weapon is to break a person and make him feel that his actions are meaningless. Raise yourself. Pride yourself that you are a prince or princess, a child of Hashem! Next time the Yetzer Hara comes knocking, tell him he's got the wrong address. We have too much pride to lower our standards to his animalistic desires! On a related note, perhaps this is also why Shabbos has the power to transform *NEGA* into *ONEG* (the same Hebrew letters).

All week we are busy with our little pursuits, we don't have the time, patience and clarity to see the big picture. On Shabbos, we break from the mundane. We can raise ourselves up and use the very *Nega* of physical pleasures by uplifting them into *Kedusha* and turning them into true *Oneg*.

It says in this week's Parsha: *"And the person with the Tzaraas in whom there is the affliction – his garments shall be torn, the hair of his head shall be shaved, and he should cover himself up to his lips; He is to call out, "Contaminated- Contaminated!" All the days the affliction is upon him shall he remain contaminated; he is contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation. His dwelling shall be outside the camp."* (Vayikra 13:45-46)

The *Midrash HaGadol* explains that he needs to call out to make his suffering known so the multitudes will beseech mercy for him!"

How does the afflicted one's sitting alone and announcing his polluted state inspire people to pray for his mercy? Perhaps there's a process at play here we can all easily appreciate. It well known that the affliction of *"Tzaraas"* is a response to the crime of *Loshon Hora* speaking negatively about others and sowing seeds of hatred between people. He is no innocent victim in this play. No! The one who now sits alone has negatively impacted the neighborhood with his loose lips and has separated friends. Therefore he is now made to sit apart. How does he ever get out of the dark soup he is in and undo the damage he has already done?

Now King Solomon (reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived) formulates the following: *"He who covers his willful transgressions will not succeed, but one who admits and abandons them shall gain mercy."* (Mishle' 28:14) Is it magical or mystical? How does it work? How does one find mercy? The Malbim comments on the verse, "A person who invests all his energy in concealing and disguising his wrongs and faults will ultimately be exposed and shamed for his incorrigible hypocrisy. A man who confesses his sins openly, on the other hand, shows his sincere contrition and will easily find forgiveness and compassion."

We have all experienced this on some level with others. Someone has offended us and we harbor deep feelings of resentment for years. As long as the hurt goes unacknowledged so the embers of enmity continue to glow. Then one day the person offers a sincere apology. The response is immediate and equally earnest, "What offense?!" It's like it never happened. In one instant- erased! What just happened?

As long as one denies and obfuscates a given wrong be it heavenward or to man, that person is as if pursued by a train he is trying to escape by foot. He is a fugitive from truth. The world wishes to shake him to his core. Then he turns to the on-coming train and admits responsibility. Suddenly the train becomes a sweet tabby cat that curls around his feet. He is instantly flooded with compassionate wishes.

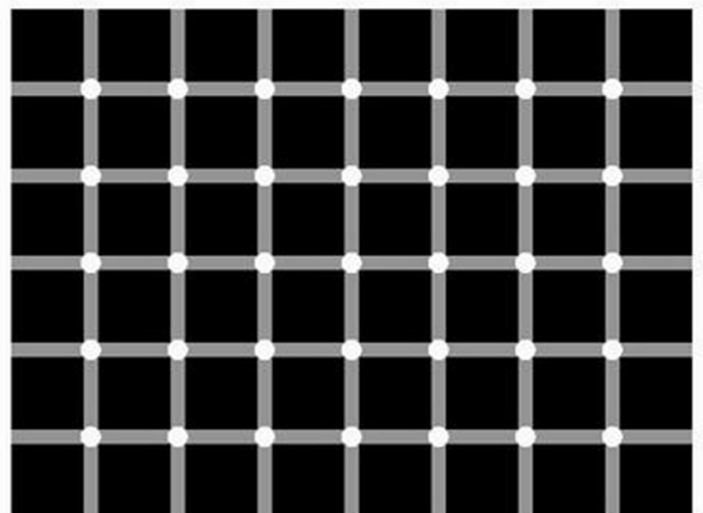
So too the chronic gossip is made to camp outside of society. He has effectively abandoned his ways and then he is made to humiliate himself by pronouncing his contaminated state to anyone who would wander too close. He admits and abandons or abandons and admits and the result is that the perception of him is altered. Instead of being hated and despised, he is looked upon as one who requires pity and mercy. His own acknowledgment has changed him and how he is beheld both in the eyes of Hashem and man. He creates meaning from suffering and demonstrates hope.

Rebbe Nachman said, "If you believe you have the ability to destroy something then you must also believe that you have the capacity to correct it." With the mouth that the afflicted one had done so much damage in the world, has he been granted by the power to repair.

By admitting our sins and being humble before Hashem, we will incur divine mercy and achieve a lasting *Teshuvah*.

ILLUSION See Black Dots...?

Our eyes trick us. Let's train ourselves to see reality and not let our eyes lead us after illusionary pleasures.



People who view themselves as bad do not change. They accept their label as an unfortunate truth they can do nothing about — thinking that even if they control themselves now, they will still be sinners because of their previous actions — so they continue to sin. They exert no effort to win their battles because they feel they would be missing out on pleasures with no gain in return. They think it is too late to turn things around and they feel hopelessly devalued.

Even worse, identifying themselves as people who do these sins causes them to live up to that label. They do not hold themselves up to any standard because instead of developing the requisite feelings for resisting sin — “I don’t do these things” — they feel that this is the way they act. And even if they are not happy with how they have been acting, they still follow the path of least resistance — to continue acting in ways consistent with their self-image.

There will be times when we make mistakes. That is normal, because we are human. Whenever we strive to accomplish something, mistakes along the way are inevitable. It is right for us to regret our mistakes and resolve not to repeat them. Sins are serious and they damage us. We should realize that certain actions are wrong and must not be committed. But we must also be sure that our sins don’t destroy us by making us feel ashamed of ourselves. Instead, we must get back up, dust ourselves off, and continue to chase our aspirations.

If we have already sinned and the challenge is still going on, we must not think that we have already blown it and it is too late. That is wrong. Each second we held ourselves back was a tremendous accomplishment, and even if we ultimately gave in, we will deal with that mistake later through teshuva. Right now we have the incredible opportunity to achieve unprecedented success by getting back up and doing what is right. This victory will be even greater than a regular victory over the yetzer hara because we will overcome an additional challenge: the urge to give up after slipping. We must focus on what we can achieve right now because that is all that matters.

Most important, we must not forget that we are intrinsically good and are striving to be better. If the yetzer hara tries to make us feel that we are bad because he got us to fall, we must stand up to his lies.

It is crucial that we respond in this way. If we don’t, we are at risk of feeling “I am a sinner and a failure at controlling my desires. It doesn’t pay to control myself. I might as well sin and get pleasure because I am a failure anyway.” We will feel inferior and besmirched with sin. We probably won’t

control ourselves, and we will be miserable.

We must realize that although we are accountable for our actions, if we have committed one or even many sins in this area, that does not make us bad. Many good people and even some great tzaddikim struggled with their desires, because it is so hard to have complete control. We must remember that we are good and that deep down, we want to do what’s right. Though we might not always feel it beneath our desires, that is the truth.

We must also remember that even one victory is a tremendous accomplishment. It is worth coming to this world for even one second of self-control! To go against our nature and succeed in this area is a legendary achievement because it is so challenging. It really does matter that we always succeed. We will not be left with nothing; we will have an astounding achievement, one that everyone will be in awe of in the World to Come. This is something we don’t want to miss. Even just one act of self-control is something to be incredibly proud of, and we will take pride in it forever.

Rather than holding us back, our mistakes give us a greater opportunity to accomplish. Getting excited about this will eliminate any poor self-image and help us attain self-control in the battle of the generation.

Source: The Battle of the Generation

Inspirational Image Of The Week

