

Metzora - Why Break up the House?

[from Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt'l]

By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Vayikra 14:3-57 we read of the plague of *tzaraas* in houses. In verse 34 we are introduced to the subject in an unusual way. The Torah states that when we come into the land of Canaan, Hashem will place a plague in the house in our land. Rashi states that this is a foretelling that plagues will come to the houses in Eretz Yisroel in order that the jewels that the Canaanites hid in their house would be given to us. The peoples of Canaan had tradition of their won that one day Yaakov's descendents would take over their land so they hid the jewels and other precious items in their walls, thinking that we would never get our hands on them. In the process of purification of houses after a plague the house would be torn apart and the gems would be discovered.

This entire parsha is difficult to understand but this part about us finding the jewels hidden inside the house is especially perplexing. My Rosh yeshiva, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zt'l, asked that if the jewels would end up being discovered, how is the plague in the house a punishment? If such a great benefit would come from this entire purification process, how would there be motivation to do teshuva? Rav Moshe Feinstein answered that if one were truly a tzaddik. One would not need to go through the hassle of having his house torn down to find the jewels. True, he finds the jewels in the end. But if one is worthy, he will be rewarded with riches through other means. The feeling of being unsettled from having one's house torn apart and rebuilt should motivate a proper teshuva even if there is gain in the end. The owner of the house should look into his own behavior as to why he gained his treasures in such a distressing way.