

## THE AFFLICTED HOUSE

The **tzara'at** which affected clothes and houses is caused by damp, and its existence is indicated by mold which is usually green or red. --- Gersonides, 14<sup>th</sup> c. France

The stages of **tzara'at** are similar to the plagues which gradually became stronger and were a warning to the Egyptians to change their ways. First they come to the house; if the inhabitants change, well and good; if not, the stones of the house have to be removed. The next stage is demolition. Then we must deal with the clothes... --- **Midrash Ruth Rabbah** 2:10

A man is asked: "Lend me some grain." He replies: "I have none." A woman is asked for a winnow or a sieve and says: "I have none." What does God do? He brings this plague upon the house, so that it will be emptied, and everyone will see what they own. --- **Midrash Vayikra Rabbah** 17:2

The afflicted house never was and never will be. Why then is it written? That we might examine it, and receive a reward for doing so. And similarly with the stoning of the rebellious son of Deut. 21:18-21, and similarly with the destruction of the idolatrous city of Deut. 13:13-19. --- Talmud, **Sanhedrin** 71a

The plague never existed, but the laws teach us to watch carefully for any small misdeed. A disease may begin with very small signs and can be stopped if noticed in its early stages, and moral decay can also be prevented from spreading if it is countered immediately. Otherwise, all the affected parts may have to be eradicated before the society can be made healthy, as suggested in Jeremiah 1:10: *See, I appoint you this day over nations and kingdoms: to uproot and pull down, to destroy and overthrow, (and only then,) to build and to plant.* --- Moses Alshikh, 16<sup>th</sup> c. Safed

The **Kohen** is instructed to *take the live bird, along with the cedar wood, the crimson thread and the hyssop, and dip them together with the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the running (literally, living) water.* --- Lev. 14:6

In offering these sacrifices, one should realize that he has sinned against his God with his body and soul and that his blood should be spilled and his body burned were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator. --- Ramban on Lev. 1:9

Rabbi Ishmael argues that, in the mixture of blood and water into which the living bird is dipped, the blood must remain visible. --- Talmud, **Sotah** 16b

Rabbi Eleazar said: Always be obscure so that you can endure. Rabbi Zeira said: We have learned likewise: “The windows of a dark house may not be opened to examine its **tzara'at**.” This proves it! --- Talmud, **Sanhedrin** 92a

It turns out that its very darkness is its salvation, for as long as the priest cannot see it, it isn't infected with **tzara'at**. --- Rashi, *ibid*.