



## FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



# Hitting Rock Bottom

The world is not a peaceful place right now. War is raging, political polarization in America is growing, and the divisions in Klal Yisrael that we had hoped were behind us have reappeared with a vengeance. Many in Israel have lost their lives, and many more have had their lives upended. Sympathy, support, and respect for Israel have weakened in America and across the globe, and the celebration of Hamas grows stronger on college campuses. It feels as if much of the moral and political progress made by the civilized world is disintegrating before our eyes. This is all profoundly concerning, but it may also present a moment of opportunity.

When we are presented with problems, with structural or moral flaws, our task is to correct them. But there are times when the problems run so deep that we have no choice but to knock it all down and start again. Ironically,

we may welcome the more complete breakdown as it offers the opportunity to remake rather than to just fiddle and fix. This idea – known in the world of addictions as “hitting rock bottom” – first appears in our Parsha.

The *Metzora* is the individual who is struck with leprosy, which usually presents as a small blemish, a discoloration of the skin, and which results in a declaration of *tumah*, severe ritual impurity. If, however, rather than a localized blemish the person instead experiences the discoloration head to toe, then he is considered pure, *kulo hofach lavan, tahor hu*, “it is all turned (leprous) white; he is ritually pure” (Vayikra 13:13). While this seems counter-intuitive, Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael* ch. 35) explained this with “rock-bottom” theory, as the totality of the loss implies that the stage is being set for complete rebirth and renewal.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) applies the same thinking to the world at large, deriving it from our Parsha:

Rabbi Neḥemya says: During the generation that the Moshiach comes, arrogance will proliferate, and the cost of living will corrupt people leading them to engage in deceit. The vine will produce its fruit and nevertheless wine will be costly. The entire government will be converted to heresy and there will be no inclination among the people to accept rebuke. This supports the opinion of Rabbi Yitzḥak, as Rabbi Yitzḥak says: The Moshiach will not come until the entire kingdom will be converted to heresy. Rava says: What is the

May the Torah learned  
from this issue of Torah Tidbits  
be לע"נ our beloved father,  
grandfather, and great grandfather  
**Abe Koslowsky z"l**  
אברהם אבא בן מנחם מנדל ז"ל  
on his 41st Yahrzeit ג ניסן

verse from which this statement is derived? It is the verse: "It is all turned (leprous) white; he is ritually pure."

To Rav Nechemya, the world may need to hit its own rock bottom for it to properly self-correct. The totality of the world's degradation makes room for its rebirth, creating the opportunity to replace today's failed hopes and systems with that which can serve as the foundation of our future strength as individuals, as families, and as a community that must in turn impact and heal the world.

It remains necessary for us to illuminate the path to that rebirth. In place of helplessness, we must do what is always in our own hands, generating the bright light of increased Tefillah, Torah, and Chessed, and focusing on the critical goal of generating Shalom b'Yisrael by replacing rhetoric with genuine understanding and compassion. ■

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