As for the Talmud's statement (Sanhedrin 21a) that there never was a house or garment smitten with tzara'as, Ramban holds that it is referring to the Diaspora. He declares that these phenomena were limited to the Holy Land, where God's nearness was more apparent. [According to Perush HaRav, that is also the opinion of Recanati.] The Talmud itself seems to give no hint of that. Instead, it explains that the detailed description of the tzara'as afflictions, which never actually occurred, had but one purpose, study and receive the reward. Undeniably, the thorough study of these chapters makes us realize the seriousness of the sins involved and their prevention, it therefore elevates us into an atmosphere filled with holiness and trust in God. (See the Commentary to 14:3.)

While the disease of tzara'as was a punishment for sin, Hashem, in His great kindness, never immediately afflicted the sinner's body with it. Rather, He first gave a warning by infecting the walls of the sinner's house with tzara'as, thereby indicating to the owner that he was expected to do tehucha. If he ignored the warning, the tzara'as then spread to his garments. If he showed remorse for his sins, the tzara'as ended there, but if not, the disease finally appeared on his body.

In our commentary on the Ethics of the Fathers (5.7) we have explained the expression of yesed as denoting an excess. It is used especially of extraordinary kindness.

Loving-kindness is practised in two ways:
First, we show kindness to those who have no claim whatever upon us;
Secondly, we are kind to those to whom it is due, in a greater measure than is due to them. (Guide to the Perplexed II, 53)
When the Israelites went to do this, some gathered more and some less.

11. When the Israelites went to do this, some gathered more and some less.

12. As the Talmon states in Yoma 15b, the day will come when the person who does not own objects, so as to avoid lending them, will be forced to empty his house and show his possessions publicly. Selfishness is vice that corrupts the whole atmosphere of a house, touching even its walls.

13. In the next mishnah (14) they seek to describe “the evil, bad way” which a person should strongly avoid. Rabbi Eliezer answers, An evil eye. This implies envy, jealousy, constant discontent, and a niggardly spirit which abhors sharing with others, or giving others. With “an evil eye” a person will say, “What I have is never enough, and what the other has is always too much.”
At that point, a wise man who was present spoke to the pechami: “What are you afraid of? When his straw gets too close to your fire, one spark from your coals will end the problem!”

This Midrash teaches a fundamental lesson about the Jewish people and the Torah in the long battle against the external forces which seek to destroy us. The Esav-nations are represented by straw: straw has only one kind of value, and that in quantity. A few pieces of straw are worthless, only in bulk does straw achieve value. Its worth is proportional to its mass. Those nations and cultures which oppose the spiritual, value the material, and the material has value in its mass; he who has more is wealthier. When Esav comes to meet Yaakov, he initially rejects Yaakov’s gift, proclaiming his wealth: “I have much.” His wealth lies in the sheer volume and mass of his possessions – “I have much.” These nations would swamp the Jewish people if they could, and establish a world unfettered by moral niceties and considerations of the spiritual; in fact, they would gladly use their bulk and might to destroy Yaakov.

Yaakov, on the other hand, meets his brother’s declaration of wealth with “For I have everything.” Spiritual values live on a plane above mass and volume, and none of the terms relating to mass or bulk are relevant – “I have everything.” Completeness is not possible in the realm of the physical, but above that realm it becomes natural.

And that is why Yaakov is likened to fire. Straw achieves value in bulk, but fire is fire no matter how little of it there is. One spark is enough to ignite a whole world of straw; and in that final and inevitable battle between the might of muscle and the light of genuine spirit, it is the small spark of real fire which will prevail. When the bales of straw,