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The first Commandment that was given to the Jewish people was setting up a calendar. Time is precious to Judaism. All we really are is an alarm clock. At certain periods of time hormones are activated. It is up to us to sanctify time. Every month we are asked to declare the new moon. We do this by witnesses. We are even allowed to violate the Sabbath in order to do so. The cycle of the moon is $29\frac{1}{2}$ days. It will either be on the 30th day of the 31st, the new moon. Why should we be allowed to violate the Sabbath? It is going to happen anyway. It is true that time will pass whether we do anything but yet we can make something of our time. We are allowed to violate the Sabbath to demonstrate that it is not the passing of time that is important but the quality of time. We are also going to fulfill a Mitzvah we can only do every 28 years, the blessing of the sun. The sun returns to the same spot in the heavens every 28 years. It is not as noticeable as the moon and it seems very regular but we, too, by our actions can make time meaningful. In Jewish law a slave cannot testify. He cannot marry and he does not have to fulfill any Mitzvahs concerned with time. For a slave time just passes. He cannot change its quality. In prison a curious thing happens to time. The ~~minutes~~ days drag but the years fly by. To a normal person the days go by quickly and the years slower because they are filled with meaningful events. A slave cannot testify or marry because these all require time. Many marriages fail today because people are not willing to give their spouses time and the time they spend together is not time filled with warmth and joy and laughter. Time will go by it's true regardless of what we do but our lives and our marriages will only be meaningful if our time is well used.

The story about a man who had a vision of G-d. He asked G-d, "Is it true that a billion dollars is to You like a penny?" G-d said, "Yes", "And is it also true that a billion years to You is like a second?" G-d said yes. The man said, "Why don't you give me a penny?" and G-d said "All right, in a second".

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TAZRIA METZORA 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In this week's Torah portion, Tazria Metzora, we learn about the dread disease, leprosy. This disease does not resemble what we today call leprosy. The Rabbis say that it was a disease which came upon a person because of loose talk. The person who received this disease had to live outside the city. He was isolated from his fellow human beings. This indeed was a very severe punishment. Why should this punishment be the punishment for one who only indulged in loose talk? After all, a thief, a robber did not receive such a severe punishment. We all know that solitary confinement is one of the worst punishments. In prison when they want to punish someone severely they put him in solitary confinement. Loose talk, though, is a very serious crime because it undermines society. It destroys trust. It destroys society. Words have meanings and when we turn the meanings and words around we destroy relationships. Part of the problem today is that we are trying to make right wrong by the use of words, by glamorizing all sorts of things. Adultery is still adultery whether we try to glamorize it by calling the person a swinger. If a person wants to be a barmaid or has to be a barmaid that is o.k., too, but we glamorize it by calling her such as a stewardess, which is essentially just a barmaid in the air. We undermine things. Of course, it is true that sometimes we have to sugarcoat life, that it is difficult to face certain truths. Telling a person he has cancer may be a very difficult thing to do while telling him that he has a slight malignancy is o.k. That is the way the doctors cured that dread disease, consumption. If you read novels from the 19th century you will notice that anytime someone was said to be consumptive it meant that they were just about dead. After 1900 you no longer had consumption. The reason for it is that the doctors decided that if you tell a person he had consumption he would die almost from fright so they changed the name and now they told him he had tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was o.k. It was just consumption that was terrible. But in the main when we change words around, when we make selfishness good, when we make evil good, and when we make loyalty and devotion old-fashioned, then we destroy society. The Torah tells us that if the plague did not change its ayin then it made the person unclean. Of course, each of us has plagues. Each of us has our own group of troubles to bear. Life is not always easy, but we cannot make life better by glamorizing the wrong things. What we are supposed to do is change

the ayin in the word nega. The word nega and oneg in Hebrew have the same letters. Nega means plague. Oneg means joy, delight. We cannot dwell always on what is wrong, on our problems. We should change the ayin from nega and take it from the back and put it in the front. We should transform it to delight, to joys. We should concentrate on what is good in life, not on what is bad in life. We should concentrate on positive things. That is the way we overcome, not by glamorizing what is bad. In this Torah portion, too, we learn also about how houses were afflicted with leprosy. The Rabbis ask, why should the homes be afflicted with leprosy? They answer that when the Jewish people would knock down the homes they would find valuables. We, too, this week witnessed the knocking down of homes at Yamit. I am sure that it made you as sick as it made me sick. All that effort for nothing. All those beautiful homes destroyed. Why didn't the Egyptians just buy them? It looks like they would rather have destruction without Jews than Jews with beautiful things that benefit everyone. It is like the story over again of Isaac and the Philistines. He would dig a well and they would fill it up until they finally realized that the water was benefiting them, too. Let us hope and pray, though, that the breaking down of these walls will turn up some valuables, the valuables of peace and harmony and brotherhood. I am reminded of a story of a young man who lost control of his car and plowed through the back of a theatre right into the stage where they were practicing a play. Luckily, no one was hurt. The director making light of it said, "Is this the way you are trying to break into show business?". The young man answered, "No, it's just a stage I am going through". Let us hope that the breaking of houses at Yamit is just a stage we are going through and that it will be followed by peace and harmony and good will between Egypt and Israel and, eventually, Israel and the entire Arab world.

27. TAZRIA

Death and Judaism

APRIL 1983

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the major thrusts of modern man has been to deny the problem of death. Death ~~is~~ something which we constantly try to camouflage, to pretend that it does not exist. ~~Our~~ cemeteries we call parks, our undertakers we call directors, and funerals, themselves. we call memorial services.

Death is a very serious problem especially to our religion which is so life affirming. We do not believe that life is evil or bad or a curse. We believe that life is a glorious opportunity to be G-d's partner in creation. As the Rabbis in Pirke ~~Avos~~ ^{Avos} said, "One moment spent in Teshuva, ~~in~~ ^{AND} good deeds, in this world is better than all the world to come". They also, though, said, "One moment of satisfaction in the world to come is better than the whole of this world". Death is especially hard to understand because it cuts us off from those whom we love and seems to make a mockery of all the good deeds and charity we do. The Rabbis were very much aware of the problem of death and they, therefore, stressed the fact that eventually it, too, will be overcome, that those who lay down will rise up again. The belief in the resurrection of the dead forms an important part of our daily prayers. We honestly do not know why G-d created death and we do not understand why it had to be part of His creation. However, we are confident that one day we will.

In the Haphtorah to the Torah portion, Tazria, we ~~have~~ ^{ARE} told a story about a Syrian general named Naman which can perhaps shed light on ~~our~~ ^{THIS} problem. We have a tendency to feel that the problems that we have today are always unique and special. This is not true. Many things may have changed in the last 4000 years but our passions have remained the same. Naman was a mighty general of Syria. He was also a leper. His army had brought back a young girl as a captive from the land of Israel and she told Naman's wife that there was a prophet in Samaria who could cure her husband from his leprosy. Naman's wife told her husband about it and he, in turn, told the King of Syria. The King of Syria then sent a letter to the King of Israel saying, "I have sent Naman, my servant, to you to cure him of his leprosy". The King was frightened. He thought this was a pretext for

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war. How could anybody cure anyone of leprosy? When Elisha heard that the King had rent his clothes he said, "Let him come to me and he shall know that there is a prophet now in Israel" so Naman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. Elisha then sent him a messenger and said, "Go wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall come back to you and you shall be clean". When Naman heard ~~about~~ this he was angry. He said, "Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Amana and the Farpar, better than all the waters of Israel?". His servants calmed him down by saying, "If the prophet had asked you to do something big, wouldn't you have done it?" and so he went and he dipped seven times in the Jordan and his flesh became clean and he was cured.

The Rabbis interpret this story as a parable about life. Each of us is like the Jordan. We really run nowhere. We run into the Dead Sea. The Jordan, itself, is composed of three parts. Three rivers flow together in order to form it: the Nachal Dan, or our judgement faculty; the Nachal Chermon, which stands for our violent impulses; and the Nachal Sneer, which stands for apron strings or our impulses to unite and to love. We must learn how to live with all these impulses. We each cut many channels as we race through life. If we learn to integrate these channels then we will create a green stretch along the barren places. If not we will evaporate into the air and in the end just be swallowed up into the Dead Sea. Naman, whose name means lovely or nice, was suffering from a spiritual disease, leprosy, or Metzora in Hebrew. He had power. He was a general of the army but this power did not satisfy him. He was depressed. He was hounded by his own mortality. The word Metzora can be read in Hebrew Metzar Ayin with the Ayin being an abbreviation for Erech, ^{VALUE.} He was depressed by his own value. He was obsessed by war and violence. He found meaning in life by constantly confronting death as if man can ever overcome death by constantly confronting it.

It may be possible to overcome ~~your~~^{our} fear of dogs by petting a dog and getting used to a dog, but we cannot do that with death. The Nazis were obsessed with death. They thought they could overcome it by constantly being exposed to it. It only made them more vicious

and more spiritually sick. Even a young little captive girl could see that Naman was spiritually ill, that he was suffering because of his obsession with death. Death can twist and turn an individual and cause him to give up on life by becoming violent or it can make him a recluse or a hermit and disfigure his whole psyche. It can shake the psyche apart so that the violent impulses come to the fore or the judgement faculty is loosened or ^{THAT} all that is left ^{OF A PERSON'S PERSONALITY} is a loving clinging to the past. Naman's violent impulses came to the fore and he led raiding parties that stole young Israelite girls.

According to the Jewish tradition, death must not be ignored, but it must not be allowed to run roughshod over our lives and ^{TURN INTO} make us living dead. Elisha the Prophet did not even go out to Naman to try to cure him. Instead he told him to dip into the Jordan. The Jordan is a symbol of Jewish learning, of Jewish life. He told him to dip into it seven times. This is an expression, of course, for continuous immersion. There are seven days in a week, seven marriage blessings, seven is a number of holiness. Seven also in Hebrew comes from the same word which means to be content, to be satisfied, to have one's fill. Satisfaction, happiness can only come from leading a life filled with Torah and Mitzvahs. It will not protect us against death. Death will eventually come to all of us and to some it will come early and in a shocking way, but all that is important is that we leave little green stretches along the way. When death comes we must acknowledge it and realize that it is one of the mysteries of life. We cannot avoid it and we should not consider it punishment. We should not court it and we should not defy it. We should instead concentrate on life. Only in this way will we be able to have the integrated personality we need in order to make this world flourish.

Soon we are to celebrate and commemorate two holidays; Yom Hashoa, Holocaust Memorial ^{DAY}, and Israel Independence Day. It is good that we remember the Holocaust and never forget. However, our life as Jews cannot be based upon death. The reason for us ^{REMAINING} being Jews cannot be because we suffer. We are Jews because of the inner joy and happiness our religion gives us. Israel Independence Day is literally the strip of green which surrounds

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the Jordan. The Jewish people is eternal. Let us immerse ourselves in our tradition, in the Jordan, and we, too, can overcome the pangs, the fears, the hurt, and the pain of death.

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This year Tazria comes out on Shabbos Achodesh. We read a special Maftir and Haftarah. In the Maftir we read that the Jewish people were commanded to dip a bunch of hyssops in the blood of the lamb and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel. When G-d commands Moshe to do this He tells him to place it on the two doorposts and then on the lintel. When Moshe commands the Jewish people to do it, he asks them to put in on the lintel and then the two doorposts. Why did Moshe change this? There are actually two pillars of religion. One is that people are religious because it gives them meaning in life. They feel needed. They feel that they have a relationship with G-d, and it gives them strength and courage to overcome their problems. There is also another pillar of religion, and that is that it allows you to help others, to reach out to other human beings. Unfortunately, in our day these two pillars have become separate. Many times you will find people who feel they have meaning in life, but they are basically selfish. They are smug and self-satisfied. They think they are holy and everybody else is no good. On the other hand, you find people who define religion as only doing good for others. These people do not find any personal satisfaction in religion, and they tend to shy away from religion because by their definition, religion is always something you do not want to do. If anything is pleasant or personally satisfying, it is not religious. Religion is when you do things for others, not for yourself. When you do anything in your interest, it is not religious. If you do it against your interest, then it is religious. This definition of religion makes religion too hard for many people. What is it that really binds these two elements of religion together? To our conception of things, it is the family. In the family we learn how to share and also how to receive. We learn how to have meaning in life and how to relate to G-d and to people. In our day you find many very brilliant people who are Mishuga because they only learn how to concentrate on one thing at a time. They do not know how to look at everything in their totality. These people were never raised in a family and, therefore, they do not know how to put things in proper perspective. In the Torah portion Tazria we learn about childbirth and about circumcision and also about leprosy, a strange

disease. This disease caused a person to be entirely alone and apart. Why should the Torah put together childbirth and bris with this disease, leprosy? This is to teach us that people who do not have a family have great difficulty in relating to others, have great difficulty integrating their lives, and many times end up lonely and alienated. It is true that there are sometimes many disputes in a family and the very act of having a family is painful, but a family teaches us the value of life. It is the lenthil between the pillars of life. There is no joy like having your family enjoying a simcha and, G-d forbid, there is nothing like having your family with you in times of troubles. Knowing how to build a family is hard. It takes time and dedication and patience and stick-to-it-iveness. It is not an easy thing, but it is not a mysterious thing. Today we come to honor a couple on their 60th wedding anniversary who knew how to raise a family. They knew that you need to give of yourself and your time and your love. Today people think they have to have \$1,000,000 before you can have children. Today they think that they cannot have children, have a family until they have experienced everything else in life. They are fooling themselves because it is only a family which will teach them how to have meaning in life. There are no secrets. There is no mystery. You have have to be there. The story about a fellow who every day came with his bicycle to cross the Mexican border. He had two sakcs and every day the officers would look in the sacks. They would only find sand or rocks or bricks. They were sure he was smuggling, but they couldn't find what. They searched his wallet but could not find anything. Finally the head of customs said, "We know you are smuggling something, but we don't know what it is. Tell me and I promise I will not prosecute you." The man said, "Are you sure?" The official answered, "Yes." The man said, "I'm smuggling bicycles." There is no mystery to raising a family. You just have to give time and love and be there.

TAZRIA-METZORAH 1991
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Tazria-Metzorah we learn about leprosy, a special skin disease which the rabbis say came upon a person because he spoke Loshan Hora. This disease caused a person to be expelled from the camp. The sin of speaking ill about others was considered such a terrible thing that this punishment was decreed for the Jews who lived in Eretz Yisroel. The rabbis say that before this disease would strike the person, himself, it first would strike his home and then his garments and then himself. It is interesting to note that in the Torah portion Metzora we say, "And G-d spoke to Moshe saying, 'This will be the law of the leper on the day of his cleanliness, and he shall be brought to the priest and the priest shall go to outside the camp'." We see right here that there is an obvious contradiction because in the first sentence it says, "And he shall be brought to the priest", and then it says the priest should go outside to outside the camp. First we see that the leper is to be brought to the priest and then we see that the priest is to go to the outside of the camp in order to inspect the leper. The Kohan shall see and behold if the plague of leprosy is cured from the leper.

Another question we have on these opening verses of the Torah portion Metzora is that in the olden days this Torah portion was not known as Metzora but as Zostieh, this will be. The rabbis always chose the first significant word in a Torah portion to be the name of the Torah portion. The first phrase, "And G-d spoke to Moshe saying" is not significant because it is repeated so often in the Torah, but here the first significant words in this Torah portion are, "This shall be...." Later rabbis have made sure that this Torah portion is not called Zostieh but Metzora, leper. This, of course, is a strange

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name for a Torah portion, too, because it signifies something which is a disparagement to an individual, and usually the Torah does not like to point out disparaging things to an individual, so why is it that this Torah portion is not called Zostieh?

What's more, when we learn about the leprosy that strikes the home, which is the first warning that something is wrong with either the person or the society, the rabbis tell us that this leprosy sometimes was for good, that when the Jewish people would try to get rid of this leprosy and they would be forced many times to dismantle the houses in order to get rid of the leprosy they would find the treasures of the Amarithes there and, therefore, leprosy actually led to some very good results. This, of course, teaches us something very important. It teaches us that when we see our institutions are creaking, when we see that they are not fulfilling their responsibilities the right way, the way they were intended to, when we see that they become corrupt or no longer seem relevant to society at large, then we should investigate them. We should look at them. Perhaps we can change them, fix them, make them better. Perhaps if we look at them more carefully we can see the true treasure beneath them. In other words, we can make them conform more accurately and more correctly to the purpose for which they were created. Many times certain institutions are created to solve certain problems in one generation and in the next generation they no longer fit. Why is there so much conflict? Why are people resorting to slander? Why are people resorting to Loshan Hora, and, of course, Loshan Hora is not just evil gossip. It is the truth but the truth that is told at the wrong time. The truth that is told with bad intent beats all the lies that you can invent, said Blake,

and he was right. When we tell the truth in any inappropriate circumstance then, of course, we can destroy people. When we tell the truth about a person's criminal record when they were a child which has no bearing on their abilities today we can destroy them. The truth can destroy as well as a lie. The truth has to be told always with Chesed, with kindness. Therefore, we see that many times people are bent on destroying others because they seek to control institutions or destroy institutions. Institutions are many times telling us whether or not we are confronting the problems of life correctly. If we are confronting the problems of life correctly then our institutions will not lead us to Loshan Hora and to personal attacks and to slander. Of course, if we do not take care of our institutions pretty soon the plague of leprosy spreads to our clothing. In other words, we can see people by the way they dress and act if they belong to this camp or that camp and there is complete disharmony in society, and, finally, it ends in vicious attacks on people without cause, etc.

At the end of the Torah portion Tazria we have something very interesting. We say that the Kohanim "shall see after the leper has washed himself and behold if the plague did not turn its appearance and did not spread then he is unclean." However, in Hebrew it says, "Behold, if the plague, the Negah, has not turned its Ayin". The last letter of the word Negah is an Ayin and if it has not turned the Ayin from the end of the word and put it in the beginning of the word then you know that this person suffers from leprosy and should be outside the camp because that person can only cure himself. That person has to spend some time investigating his own deeds so that he can enter society without having to have the need to slander and hurt anybody. Ayin,

when it is put in front of the word Negah, changes the word from Negah, plague, to Oneg, to pleasure. Many times when a plague comes and we can look at the reasons for the plague and look at it as a challenge and try to change and make things better, then it becomes an Oneg, then it becomes a pleasure, then it becomes something which rejuvenates and rehabilitates individuals and institutions.

The question still remains, why is it that in the beginning of the Torah portion Metzorah we say, "And the leper shall be brought to the Kohen," and later we say that the Kohan shall go to the outside of the camp. The answer for that is that many times a leper is brought almost against his will to the Kohan. Many times people slander religion. They think that religion is something which is holding man back. They feel that the Jewish religion in particular is medieval and is not worthy of even being at and learned and many times they think that the religion, itself, gets in the way of even saving the Jewish people. This is the attitude of many of the early pioneers of the land of Israel. Of course, we have just recently celebrated Israel Independence Day, and we know that Israel is vital to the Jewish survival in our modern era, and the Jewish people, many of them who went to Israel in the early days thought that the religion was a hindrance to the survival of the Jewish people because it did not allow the Jewish people to readily adapt to their surroundings and to learn how to protect themselves and to do those things which were necessary to create a nation which would save the Jewry of Europe and other countries. But we see that they are being brought back to religion. We are seeing that they realize that they need it. They have been brought to the Kohanim, especially now after the Gulf War where many

secular Israelis are talking about the great miracle which occurred where after all those SCUD attacks only one person was really killed directly from the SCUD attacks and that was because he left his safe room because he was scared and tried to run downstairs. The whole fabric of Israeli society is being brought back to the Jewish religion because people need it. We are not religious because we want to please our parents or please tradition but because we realize that we need it. People come to shul every day not because they are forced to come but because they know they need it. It is important that the Jewish people recognize that when they get too far from G-d they are going to be brought back because they need it. We see, too, that many of the forms of ceremonies in the State of Israel are founded on religious principles, and that the Jewish people are coming back. They may not come back exactly the way we want them and at the pace that we want, but we see that they are coming back. That applies, too, in the Untied States as well where there are many people who are coming back to religion, who at one time thought they did not need it or their parents or grandparents thought they did not need it, but they see that they do need it. It is not an overwhelming movement. It is 5%, 10%, but a significant movement, and the Kohanim should go out to meet them. When people are being brought back the Kohanim should go out to understand their problems. Unfortunately, many times the religious leaders, both in the synagogue and in the rabbinate, make it hard for people to go back. They do not make it easy for them to come back, but the Kohan are supposed to go outside the camp to learn what their problems are and see how we can help them come back. The Kohanim should not wait until the leper is 100%

healed, but when he is being brought back to the camp he should go and take a look and advise him and tell him what he should do, and when he sees that he is 100% healed then he should immediately bring him back in. We should not do, as many people are, make it extremely hard for people to come back.

Therefore, in the olden days this Torah portion was called Zostieh, this shall be because the rabbis did not conceive of a situation where such a great portion of the Jewish people would be outside, so to speak, the camp. They could not conceive of a situation where so many of the Jewish people would feel that they do not really need religion, which is basically the situation of the Jew in America. Therefore, they said, "This will be. This is the situation that will be. We will think about it. We will concern ourselves about it when it happens," but in the last centuries we have seen that this situation is a reality. So many Jews are outside the camp figuratively, and so many of these Jews are being brought back, some even against their will, like the Russian Jews, who are being kicked out of Russia and are being forced to confront their heritage with all the problems that that entails. We, the rabbis, should go out to meet them to try to solve their problems the best that we can. That, of course, is why this Torah portion is called for us Metzarah because it is a real problem and we should deal with it in a real way because the Jewish people have throughout the generations always proved that they will come back because they need to come back. In order to maintain their identity as Jews, in order to maintain their mission of being G-d's partner in creation, in order to be true to the Jewish mission of correcting the world and preparing the world and making this a better place we need the Jewish religion.

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I am reminded of the story about a rabbi who went out to play golf and the first time he swung at the golf ball he missed completely. He said, "Oops." The caddy suggested he try again and stand a little farther back. He stood a little farther back only this time he hit the ground and twisted his golf club. He did not even touch the ball. He yelled, "Oh my goodness." Then the caddy suggested he try a third time. This time he hit the ball but it hit a tree and came right back and hit him on the head. All of a sudden he yelled, "I quit. I quit." The caddy said, "Are you quitting golf?" He said, "No, I'm quitting the rabbinate." Of course, he could not quit the rabbinate. He came back, but at that moment he was frustrated and wanted to say all those terrible words a rabbi is not supposed to say in public. Many times, too, we Jews get frustrated with our religion. Sometimes we think it is holding us back from actually doing those things which G-d wants us to do, and we become frustrated and go outside the camp, but we will be brought back and we, the religious leadership, both the rabbis and in the synagogue, should make sure that the people can come back, that we understand their problems and help them come back. In this way we can rest assured that the Mashiach will come quickly and in our day. Amen.

TAZRIA-METZORA 1993
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we read a double Torah portion. We read Tazria and Metzora. It seems strange that the Torah portion Tazria is called Tazria. Usually a Torah portion is named for the first significant word in the Torah portion, but here we got a sentence and a half before we find a word to name this Torah portion after. There are other significant words that occur before the word Tazria, but the rabbis have chosen the word Tazria here to be the name of the Torah portion. Why should this be so?

We also know that when a leper, and most of the Torah portion Tazria and Metzora, is cured he has to bring three sacrifices. He has to bring a guilt offering, a sin offering, and a burnt offering. Why should it be that he has to bring a burnt offering? We can understand why he has to bring a guilt offering. He has to bring a guilt offering because he is guilty before G-d. When you slander other people you not only sin against the person who you have slandered but you also sin against G-d. We can understand why he brings the sin offering because, after all, he has sinned against a person by slandering him, but why should he bring a burnt offering? A burnt offering signifies getting close to G-d. What does that have to do with his sin? Why should he have to bring a burnt offering?

Finally, in last week's Torah portion Shmini we learn about what makes animals clean or unclean, what makes animals kosher, etc, and there we learn about what makes an animal holy or not while here we learn about what makes a man holy or not, what makes a man ritually unclean, etc. Why do we learn about the animals before we learn about mankind? Why are the animals dealt with first? The rabbis say, based upon Rab Seemlai, that the same reason why the animals are mentioned in creation first is the same reason why their laws of holiness are mentioned before man's laws of holiness here in the Torah portion. There are 4 reasons give by the rabbis why the animals were created before man. The first reason they give is so that man would not become haughty. Man should not say, "Well, I am the best and only thing in creation." He should realize that even the gnats

were created before him. The second reason given is because man should not feel that he has co-equal powers with G-d. If man would have been created first, he could have claimed that it was his planet, his idea, his design that caused the animals to be created, but man was created last to show that G-d is the sole creator of what exists in the world. We are also partners with G-d but only in rearranging the creation so that it would act in harmony. The third reason given is so that man would be created right before Shabbos so he would enter into doing lots of mitzvahs, that man was created to do mitzvahs and if he was created on Friday he would get ready for Shabbos and he would do lots of mitzvahs. The fourth reason given is to teach us how we are to treat our employees and members of our family, etc., that when G-d created man He created everything complete for him. He gave man a task to do. All the things he needed for that task were at hand. The same thing is true if you hire an employee and you want him to do a particular job for you you have to give him all the tools and all the requisite materials so he can do the job. If you do not give him these things then you cannot blame him if the job is not done correctly. The same thing is true with your family. You cannot blame your family for not doing certain things if you do not give them the proper tools and proper materials to make sure that they can do what you want them to do. We see that this is almost the same difference as the difference between talent and expertise. Talent is something that you are born with. Talent is something that just bubbles over in a person. Expertise is something that you have to try hard to develop. Mozart had talent. In fact, people say today that we cannot write the notes as fast by copying Mozart's music and Mozart could have originally write it. Mozart just bubbled over with music. That is different than expertise. Expertise is when you have to work hard to master a subject. Of course, there is a difference between a talent and expertise in that expertise is more inward. Once you have won the struggle to acquire certain knowledge that it stays with you more, makes more of an impression upon you, while talent can

external to one's basic personality. In fact, they say about Rav Simlai that he once asked Rav Yochanan to look up his geneology. Rav Yochanan was the geneological expert of that time and he refused to do it. The rabbis say the reason he refused to do it was because there were a lot of brigands and thieves and unsavory in Rav Simlai's past and he did not want that to be brought out to affect the way people look at Rav Simlai. We all know that man can be both good and bad. Man is a little lower than the angels. Man can be even as great or greater than the angels because man has free will and man can choose to reach great heights that even angels cannot achieve because angels do not have free will. The first Lubavitcher rebbe said the reason man was created last and that here in these laws of holiness man is mentioned last is because man can be even worse than the animals. Man can be much worse than the animals. Just during this past week we have all witnessed the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and there at the Holocaust Museum we see how man can be so much worse than any beast, that the terrible horrors and cruelty and wanton sadism that was displayed in the concentration camps and in the Holocaust is something that no animal would even do. We see that going on today in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We see even today how the Serbs have taken out their frustrations on the Moslems and how they have practiced ethnic cleansing and we see how they have burnt people alive and done terrible things. We know that the Croats, too, are doing terrible things to the Moslems because they sense the Bosnia-Herzegovina is going to be divided and they want to get their share before the Serbs gobble everything up. In fact, this is an old problem. World War One started in Sarajevo when Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated by a Bosnia Serb at the instigation of the Serbian government who wanted to gain greater advantage over the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. We know that what is being played out today in Europe is really the end of the First World War. Russia could not understand how Austria-Hungary could act how they did because it was Russia who actually rescued Bosnia-Herzegovina from Turkey and gave it over to Austria-Hungaria, and

Russia, of course, backed the Serbs and Austria-Hungaria did not want the Serbs to grow too mighty because they were threatening their empire. They controlled most of present Yugoslavia. We see that it is not important what the facts of the First World War here to this Torah portion obviously, but they demonstrate what this Torah portion is talking about. It is talking about how man can act worse than animals, that when a man acts in a certain way in order to achieve his goals and aims that he is liable not only to use good goals but he is also liable to use terrible goals, sadistic means, cruel means in order to achieve his goals.

That is why it mentions here Tazria because each of us has a soul. G-d has implanted within us a soul, but this soul must be nurtured. It must be given proper education otherwise it will lie dormant in all of us. Man can use his soul to scale great heights, to get close to G-d. He can transform this world into almost a paradise, but if he does not heed his soul, if he crushed it or allows it to be dormant he becomes worse than the beasts. That is why it says here Tazria because a woman when she becomes pregnant and produces a seed, what she has to do it nurture that baby, take care of the baby. She has to make sure that she takes care of herself so that the baby will have proper nourishment. She cannot have too much alcohol. She is not supposed to smoke. She is not supposed to take drugs that will hurt that baby. When the baby is born she has to take certain procedures so that the baby will be born properly. Thank G-d, today we have cesarian operations because in the olden days 15-20% of all women died in childbirth. It was a terribly frightening experience. That is why men instinctively know that women are braver than they are. That's why men have to parade to be macho and so forth, because they know that a woman, because of a product of love, endangers her life, and it was not in those days an insignificant danger. A man has to prove that he is as brave as a woman and, therefore, he has to engage in many macho type activities. A woman has to nurture and care for the baby, and even after the baby is born she

has to make sure that that baby lives. She has to dedicate herself to feeding the baby and caring for the baby. That is similar to the soul that is implanted in all of us. We can, to a certain extent, cause that soul within us to deaden and lie dormant and not to bring to flower the moral perfection of each of us. We have to nurture it and care for it. We have to realize that we do not believe that man is born good. We also do not believe that man is born evil. We believe that man is born neutral and that man will take the course of least resistance unless he is trained to do good. Therefore, we have to nurture the baby and train the baby to do good. That is why they use the word Tazria. You will cause the baby to come forth, and the same thing you will cause the soul to flower. You will cause people to be holy, but unless you do that then man will be even lower than the beasts.. Why is it that the leper, a Metzora, received leprosy? Because he spoke ill of others. He slandered others. Why do people slander others? Because they do not want to face their own faults. They want scapegoat. That's why Germany needed a scapegoat and blamed us. That is why today, too, scapegoats are being looked for all over the world and instead of people trying to solve their problems the Serbs say it was all the Moslems' fault who ruled them for 400 years. After all, it was because Russia fought Turkey that Serbia actually regained her freedom and later on Bosnia-Herzegovina was given over to Austria, etc., that problems people always blame on somebody else. That, of course, is the Metzora, the leper. He blames all his problems on everybody else and he slanders them. That's why when he had to bring a sacrifice he had to bring a guilt sacrifice because he had sinned against G-d by slandering. He had to bring a sin sacrifice because he sinned against an individual, and he had to bring a burnt offering because he did not face his own problems. He did not realize that in order to get close to G-d you have to admit the things that you have done wrong. You cannot blame other people for them. It is because he had low self-esteem that he did not realize that G-d would accept him even with his faults, as long as he is trying

to correct his faults. That, of course, is why it is so important that we look at ourselves and examine what our faults are and try to nurture our souls to overcome our faults.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a golfer who had a terrible day at the course. He came back to the clubhouse and looked at his caddy and said, "You know, I think you're the worst caddy in the whole world." The caddy looked at him and said, "I don't think so." The man asked why and the caddy said, "Because it would be too much of a coincidence." Many times we try to transfer our own faults onto other people, and when we do that we create terrible disharmony. We deaden our soul and we do not allow our soul to rise up to be what it should be. Adam means man and Adam in Hebrew also means the earth, the ground, but it also means Adam Elohim, I can be comparable to G-d. It is our business to make sure that we perfect our souls. It is our business to make sure that we nurture them, that we cause them to grow, to cause us to be holy people, that we cause us to develop within ourselves the best instincts and cause us to develop within ourselves a moral nature which will allow us to live in harmony with ourselves, with others, and with G-d so truly the Mashiach will come quickly in our day.
Amen.

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Today we are reading the twin Torah portion, Tazria-Metzorah. In these Torah portions we learn about a disease which is translated as leprosy but which is not modern day leprosy, which is known as Hanson's Disease. The disease that is described in these two portions is a disease which is caused because of spiritual factors. The rabbis say because people performed certain sins they, therefore, get this particular disease. This disease was only known in Biblical times and not in our times. Primarily a person got this disease for speaking Loshan Hora, for speaking evil gossip about people. Loshan Hora is when you tell the truth of somebody, not when tell a lie about somebody, but you tell the truth in an inappropriate time. The truth that is told with bad intent beats all the lies that you can invent, as Blake said. We all know people have been ruined because others have brought up things from their past which are not relevant at all to current practices and to the current situation of the individual. For example, maybe a person when he was a teenager had a felony conviction but it has no bearing at all on his position in the community today. Perhaps if he applied for a job then that fact should be made known to his future employer, but what difference does it make to his social acquaintances? We all know that people like to indulge in different types of behavior and then say that they are not responsible. That is why the Torah mentions here something very interesting. It says, "The plague leprosy when it will be in a man and he shall be brought to the Kohen." In other words, the person does not come of his own accord, which is different than later on when we learn that this disease also struck the homes of the people when they entered into the land of Israel it says, "And he shall come to the one who has a house and he shall tell the Kohen saying, 'It seems like there is a plague in my house'." In other words, when it comes to a person's property, a person

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many times will want to protect it, and when he sees that certain bad characteristics are being displayed at his property, he notices certain defects, he wants them cured immediately otherwise his property will fall apart and he does not want that to happen, but when it comes to his own character many times he rationalizes and says nothing he is doing is really wrong. He is really doing the right thing. The rabbis say that the disease of leprosy comes upon a person not just for speaking Loshan Hora but they give seven other illustrations of sins. They say it comes because of slander, murder, swearing falsely, theft, vanity, miserliness, and incest. So we see that this disease of leprosy came upon a person when he failed to keep those commandments between man and man. This disease did not come upon a person when he failed to keep the commandments between man and G-d. It is many times easier to keep the mitzvahs between man and G-d than between man and man because when you get into interpersonal relationships it is so easy to rationalize and to make yourself out right when you are really wrong. We all know that with alcoholics and people who are on drugs and people who have bad tempers and bad personality traits. These people never say it is their fault. They always say their alcoholism had nothing to do with the problem, when actually it really had a lot to do with the problem. We see that with child abuse and wife abuse. These people are never willing to admit that what they are doing is wrong. They always have some sort of excuse and, therefore, they have to be brought to the Kohen because this type of antisocial behavior cannot be put up with in a community because if this antisocial behavior becomes the norm then the community is ruined, so these people have to be brought to the Kohen. It has to be made known to them that their actions are unacceptable vis a vis the

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community and they have to be brought to the Kohen in order to find some redress for these very egregious sins that they are committing, social sins that they are committing against the community.

It is interesting to note also that when a person has this particular disease this person is told that he has to go outside the camp and he has to call ahead of him, "I am ritually unclean." The rabbis, though, have another interpretation for that. They also say that a person who is ritually unclean will always call out and project his ritual uncleanness against others. In other words, he will say that that person is no good and that person is no good when really he is referring to himself because he feels he is no good so everybody else becomes no good as well. Because he feels inferior he adopts, so to speak, a superiority complex and tries to show everybody else is inferior. Haven't you always noticed that somebody who is shouting at the top of his lungs who keeps yelling, "I hate people who shout." People who usually have a particular fault like to project it onto other people. That, of course, is what you find many times. People who have bad causes, people who have done terrible things project what they have done against their enemy. Usually good people will project only good against others but bad people always try to assume that their enemies are even worse than they are and they are pretty bad. Unfortunately, sometimes people swallow it. When they are accused of all these things they begin to believe it.

Unfortunately, we see that is happening today in Israel where many people in Israel all of a

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sudden are beginning to believe the Arab propaganda, that maybe the Arabs are really right, that we are really wrong and our cause is unjust, and you can see that in many instances the way Israel representatives reply and the way the Israeli government seems to be acting. Yes, they are attacking now in Lebanon with artillery and airplanes and so forth, but it seems to me that this in many ways is just a cover for something else that is going on. They are letting in now to Israel, supposedly so they can vote in Gaza on the revoking of the PLO charter, that Eliekaled, who was responsible for how many plane hijackings, they are letting in Abu Abas, who killed Klinghoffer, a man in a wheelchair, threw him into the sea. They are letting in the person who planned the Malut massacre where all those young children were killed. They are letting in the person who planned the attack in Munich against the Israeli athletes. They are letting them in. How could they let them into the country in order to participate in this PLO convention? True, we want the charter amended, but can't they do it in Tunis? They are letting in known murderers, people who attacked innocent people. Now this is not to be compared to what Israel did in Lebanon. Israel, by accident, killed certain people. In war there are always accidents. After all, when Qadaffi made a terrorist in Berlin he killed several American soldiers, President Reagan sent airplanes against him, probably to get him but instead these airplanes killed his daughter. Nobody blamed the United States for that. That was just a response of war. It was not done on purpose, but these people are purposefully seeking out innocent people to kill just to make their point. They do not consider this killing. They consider this freedom fighting, and, therefore, by us letting them in, we are agreeing that they are freedom fighters. How is this going to be any

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different from Hamas, from those people who are now killing innocents? Of course, most of the people in Hamas who do the actual blowing up themselves get killed, but how about their handlers and the people who organized it? They are not to be held responsible either because they are really freedom fighters? How can we agree with this? How can we let this happen?

In fact, it is interesting to note that in the Torah portion Metzora when a person is cured from his leprosy, what does he do? It says, "He is also brought to the Kohen and the Kohen goes to the outside of the camp." Now how could it either he is brought to the Kohen or the Kohen goes outside. How can it be both? The answer the rabbis say is that the Kohen went out to the edge of the camp; the man was not brought into the camp. The Kohen first had to examine him and did not let him into the camp. How can you let these murderers into the camp of the Jewish people unless you really feel that they are right, and if they are right, what kind of justification do we have to be an Israel at all? Therefore, if Israel loses its will, if it does not think that its cause is just anymore, then we are in for an awful lot of trouble, because people are not willing to fight for unjust causes, for causes that they perceive to be unjust. If we think that the PLO is right, and we have to remember that the PLO was founded before the 1967 War, the PLO still talks about destroying all of Israel. Arafat just made a speech about that in Stockholm. He said he is not going to use armies. He is going to use psychology and terror, but still his ultimate goal is the destruction of Israel, which he talks about all the time. These are not people who are Baal Teshuvos. These are not people who come to the Kohen and say they have changed completely. He is not allowed into the

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camp until the Kohen examines him again, even though all manifestations of the leprosy seem to be gone, because we have to make sure that he is not going to go back to his old way. Belilah Kaled even refused to sign a paper saying she would not commit any more terrorist acts and the government still let her in. How could this be? George Habash is told he can come to this conference, too. This man is responsible for so much Jewish blood. It is interesting to note that when it comes to the leprosy that attacks an individual, the rabbis say that that is a product of sin, but there is a leprosy, which I talked about before, which attacks the house. There the sentence says something different. It says, "When you come to land of Canaan which I am giving to you as a possession, and I will give the plague of leprosy in your houses in the land of your possession." G-d does not say if; He says I am going to give you this leprosy in your houses. It is not a product of sin, the rabbis say. In fact, G-d did something very important here by causing leprosy to come to these houses. The Jewish people had to take about their houses and they found all the jewels and riches that the Canaanites had hidden there so, therefore, this was really a blessing. It was not really a plague. Therefore, when the owner comes to the Kohen he says, "I see it is like a plague," but it is really not a plague. It is only an opportunity. The house looks like it is defective and like it may even have to be torn down but when they take apart part of it they find all these treasures. It is really a blessing in disguise. Perhaps what is going on in Israel today is really a blessing in disguise. Maybe G-d is causing these Nega to occur so eventually things will turn out for the better. Let's all hope that that is really the case, but it is really hard to understand how murderers are being let into the country to vote on an issue which you know

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they are going to vote against. Belilah Kaled says she is going to vote not to change the charter. How can they let her into the country? It does not make any sense. She has to be brought to the Kohen and the Kohen has to examine her first outside the camp. Yes, we want the PLO charter changed but let them do it in Tunis. Don't let them do it in Gaza where they have to even go from Jericho to Gaza through Israeli territory, through Israeli authorities. What they are saying, yes, these people are murderers. They are freedom fighters. If they are freedom fighters then that means that Israel has no right to exist. Let us all hope and pray that our people will understand what is going on, that they are not just trying to destroy Israel with arms. They are first trying to destroy Israel's will so that even if Israel has arms, they will not use it. Everyone has agreed that after the collapse of Russia the PLO was on its last legs. It is Israel that resurrected the PLO. Let us hope that they have not created a monster here, but that they will realize what they are doing and always realize that the Jewish cause and Israel is just and it is not an unjust cause. If it ever becomes in Jewish eyes an unjust cause then Israel is through.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who knocked on the White House door late one evening at 10:00 p.m. waking up Abraham Lincoln. In those days there was no Secret Service. Abraham Lincoln went and opened the door. The man came in breathless, about 25 years old, and said, "Sir, I work for the Treasury Department in a minor position, but I just heard that my boss died and I would like to take his place." Abraham Lincoln looked at the man and said, "Sir, it's okay with me, but have you checked with the funeral director?"

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Let's all hope and pray that Israel has not decided to change places with the PLO. The PLO was moribund, was about ready to die. Let us hope we have not resurrected and agreed to change places with its moribund condition. Let us hope and pray that what is happening in Israel today will only be like a plague, but that it will really be a blessing in disguise. Let us all hope and pray that the Jewish people will always realize the justness of their cause and will continue to help Israel so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Tazria we learn about a disease which is called leprosy, but that leprosy is not what we normally call leprosy today. What we call leprosy today is Hansen's Disease. The rabbis say that this was a special disease which came upon a person when he committed all sorts of sins against his fellow human beings, like slander or murder or swearing falsely or vanity or begrudging other what they have. It was sins of an anti-social nature and which were personified especially by gossip, by talking bad about other people. The rabbis say that these anti-social vices are very destructive of society, and that people who engage in them many times do not even know that they are engaging in them, especially when it comes to such things as wife abuse and child abuse and alcohol abuse. People deny them. They feel that these are not thing that they are doing. That is why it says in the text, "And he shall be brought to Aaron, the High Priest," because people have a tendency to project their faults on others. We all know that a person who is always yelling at the top of his voice is the first person who will say, "I hate people who yell." Or people who are constantly talking in shul are the first people to talk against other people who are talking in shul. We all know that this is especially true with child abuse, that usually a person will single out the child who most resembles him or her and that child will be subjected to all types of abuse because a person is not happy with his own character, and the person finds in that other child things that he, himself, is guilty of but, instead of admitting it, instead of trying to change it, what this person does many times is to take it out on that child. Of course, this is doubly bad because then all the other children pick up on it and start to malign this particular child, too. We know that this occurs very often in marriage situations where a spouse will say, "I have a right to my opinion," but when the other spouse states their opinion, then it is abuse, or that

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This week we read the Torah portion Tazria-Metzora. In this Torah portion we learn about leprosy. This disease is really not modern leprosy, but is a disease which came upon a person because of spiritual defects. The rabbis say that the disease came upon a person because he spoke Loshan Hora. Loshan Hora does not mean that you tell lies about a person, but that you tell the truth about a person when you had no need to do so. Unless a person has a need to know, there is no purpose telling others about what they have or have not done except to destroy them and mock them. The rabbis teach us that unless you are inquiring about a marriage prospect or are thinking about giving someone a job or a loan, the people you ask have no business telling you negative things about another person. In fact, we even learn that you are not supposed to talk negatively about yourself.

The story is told about the Chofetz Chaim who built his reputation by teaching us how and when we can say things about others. He once came to a town to give a lecture. He was picked up by a teamster. He asked that this teamster drive him to the hall where he was going to speak. Along the way, the teamster told the Chofetz Chaim how excited everyone was in town because that great man, the Chofetz Chaim, was coming to speak. The Chofetz Chaim said,

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"Well, he is not such a great man." The teamster got very excited and kicked him out of his wagon and proceeded to the lecture. The Chofetz Chaim came to the hall tired and muddy, and started to speak. The teamster was sitting in the front row and recognized his passenger. He apologized profusely. The Chofetz Chaim said, "There is not need to. A person should not even speak bad about himself." The truth of the matter is that when people run themselves down, they almost always do so so it is easier for them to run down others.

The rabbis teach us that there were three types of leprosy: a leprosy which attacked a person's person; a leprosy which attacked a person's clothing; and a leprosy which attacked a person's house. We learn in the Torah portion Metzora how it says, "When you will come to the land of Canaan which I am giving to you as a possession, and I will put the plague of leprosy in the house of the land of your possession." This is very strange wording. It does not say that if you do such and such a bad thing, it is going to happen, but it says, when you will go to the land. When it talks about a leprosy of a person's person or his clothing, it says if not when. It says, "The one to whom the house belongs will come to a Kohen, and he will tell the Kohen saying,

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'Something liked a plague has appeared to me in the house,' and the Kohen shall command and they shall clear the house before the Kohen will come see the plague." The rabbis explain that a person is not a very good judge when he is personally involved, and even if he were a scholar, he should not say this is a plague. He should wait until an objective third party says it is a plague.

The story is told of the Taz, who was one of the greatest commentators on the Shulchan Orech, who had a complaint against his tenant. He knew he could not judge him himself, so he brought him to the local rabbi, who was much inferior to him in scholarship. The Taz presented his case citing source after source. The poor illiterate tenant could only state his case in a very simple sentence. The rabbi found in favor of the tenant. The Taz was amazed. He approached the rabbi and said, "On what source did you base your ruling?" The rabbi said, "I based it on the ruling of the Taz who wrote such and such in a similar case." The Taz had forgotten his own previous ruling because he was so involved in his own case.

Human beings are composed of three elements which correspond to the

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tributaries of the Jordan: a judgmental faculty; a need for relationships and love; and drive and ambition, which can lead to violence. These correspond to the River Dan, the River Shneer, and the River Chermon, which combine to form the River Jordan. Unless they are adequately integrated, they will just run to the Dead Sea and leave nothing behind, but if they are integrated correctly, they will leave green patches, fertile fields along the River Jordan.

We all know that we can justify everything. Even Milosovic can justify what he is doing. After all, the Catholic Croatians, the Greek Orthodox Serbs, and the Moslem Albanians have been fighting for generations. It would be better if each would live in their own area, and then there would be no fighting. It is similar to today in Israel where they say the Arabs and Jews have to be separated and have their own states. We all know that when we look at the killing and raping, that this argument holds no water. Milosovic has to be stopped.

The Torah is telling us here, when you come into the land of Canaan, you have to be very careful because your institutions, your houses are going to be

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afflicted with a plague. People are going to be able to rationalize all sorts of things which should not be. Therefore, the Kohen is to take everything out of the house into the light of day so everybody can see what is going on. No person can say whether the person is giving his real motives or just rationalizing. Many people say they cannot give charity because they have nothing, and then we see their houses are filled with gorgeous items, or a person who says he cannot participate in the community because he has no strength, and then all his sports equipment is shown. Institutions, too, can try to justify what they do by all sorts of reasons, but if everything is out in the open, then many times things are seen in a different light.

I am going to tell you a true story about what happened in Houston. One of the largest synagogues here had a rabbi and a cantor. The cantor had health problems and the cantor's wife had health problems, so some of the members of the congregation decided to buy the cantor a car. When the board heard about it, they decided this way: either these members take back their car; or they also buy the rabbi a car; or the board was going to subtract the value of the car from the cantor's salary. Of course, many logical reasons were given, but the upshot

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was that the cantor quit and so did half the congregation, and many of the other half of the congregation who remained decided they would not accept any dues increases and did not give any donations to the synagogue except for their dues. The synagogue, of course, folded a few years later.

Nobody has to belong to a synagogue. In this community, nobody has to send their children to Jewish schools. Institutions have to make sure that they are not afflicted with the plague of Tzoras, leprosy. If the decisions of an institution can stand the scrutiny of all its members, then something is wrong with that decision. I know many times people have very good reasons, but these reasons must be able to stand the scrutiny of the whole community. How many youngsters do I know who do not have a Hebrew education because of some things which happened in the community, and how many institutions have suffered because decisions have not been correct? We can always give good reasons, but not always do these reasons comfort us. They cannot hide the fact that things just do not smell right. We all have to balance our judgmental faculty, our ability, and our need for relationships. If we do not look at things with our heart and with our head and with our ambition, we will be in great

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trouble.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an airplane that was taxiing for takeoff. The pilot aborted the takeoff and went back to the gate. After an hour and a half, the plane started to taxi again. A voice came over the intercom and said, "When we were taxiing one and a half hours before on this runway, the pilot heard a strange noise. It took us an hour and a half to get a new pilot." Not all reasons are good reasons. Let us hope that all the decisions we make can stand the scrutiny of the community so that our institutions remain strong and will never be afflicted with Tzoras.