Thoughts for Tazria-Metsora: Freedoms and Constraints

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Angel for Shabbat, Tazria-Metsora

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“Tazria” is from the root “zera,” seed. It represents fertility, growth, development. On a broader level, it represents those forces in our lives that help us to be free and strong, that allow us to draw on our talents to be as creative and productive as we possibly can be.

“Metsora” includes the word “tsar,” narrowness. It represents constriction and limitation. On a broader level, it represents those forces in our lives that stultify our freedom and strength, that restrict our movements and our thoughts.

We read two parashiyot this Shabbat, Tazria and Metsora. Perhaps the underlying message is that these two elements go together. Life is composed of ups and downs, growth spurts and plateaus, creativity and suppression. How wonderful it is to live in a free society that respects us for who we are. How excellent it is to be able to speak freely and honestly without fear of oppression. When we feel the power of “Tazria” we feel we can achieve much and give much to the world.

How very bitter it is to live under tyrannies where freedom of religion, speech and movement are curtailed, where one has to be afraid of being condemned and harmed. When we feel the power of “Metsora” we curl up into frightened silence.

But don’t we, who are fortunate to live in free societies, also well understand the forces of “Metsora?” We can’t board an airplane without going through security; we can’t enter an office building without showing our i.d.s. When we buy food products, they generally have safety labels to prove they have not been subjected to tampering. We learn, almost as a matter of fact, that we cannot trust human beings. There are people who want to murder us, blow up our airplanes, poison our food. Our lives are constricted by the fear of terror and violence.

We also are increasingly confronted with a "thought police" that seeks to control our freedom to think on our own. If we are not "politically correct," we are subjected to vilification. News reports are often slanted in order to curry favor with this or that power group. It takes intellectual clarity and moral courage to stand up against those who seek to constrain us.

Tazria reminds us of the power to renew and to increase the forces of good. Although Metsora is a fact of life, so is Tazria. Although there are those who promote the impurity of Metsora, there are also many who promote freedom and creativity, beauty and harmony. Life is an ongoing struggle between Tazria and Metsora. Let us be sure that we ourselves are identified with freedom, and hope, and purity.

Angel for Shabbat