

ORIGINAL

# 34 / P.K.C.

ADDRESS

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PRESENTED TO THE 59TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE

UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

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(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I WANT TO THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH FOR INVITING ME TO SPEAK TO YOU THIS MORNING. I'M PLEASED TO GIVE THE KEYNOTE FOR THIS SPECIAL PROGRAM DEVOTED TO AIDS.

MAY I ALSO SAY THAT I RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE THE LEADERSHIP SHOWN BY THE U.A.H.C. ON THIS VERY DIFFICULT ISSUE. TWO YEARS AGO IN LOS ANGELES RABBI SCHINDLER PRESENTED THIS ORGANIZATION WITH THE CHALLENGE OF DOING SOMETHING ABOUT AIDS.

AND SINCE THAT TIME, YOUR NATIONAL U.A.H.C. COMMITTEE ON AIDS, HEADED BY DR. BORIS O'MANSKY, HAS PRODUCED A GREAT DEAL OF USEFUL INFORMATION ON THE SUBJECT.

AND I'M THINKING IN PARTICULAR OF THE MANY EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS PREPARED FOR USE AMONG THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF YOUR REFORM CONGREGATIONS.

IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, THE U.A.H.C. WAS THE FIRST NATIONAL JEWISH ORGANIZATION TO STEP OUT AND TAKE THIS LEADERSHIP POSITION. I THINK YOU DESERVE A GREAT DEAL OF CREDIT FOR DOING THAT. I MIGHT ADD THAT YOU HAVE ALSO EARNED THE THANKS OF A NATION SORELY TRIED BY THIS TERRIBLE DISEASE.

SO, WITH THESE KINDS OF FACTS IN MIND, I WAS HAPPY TO ACCEPT RABBI SCHINDLER'S INVITATION TO ADDRESS THIS SESSION OF YOUR 1987 GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BUT, TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I HAD ANOTHER REASON TO SAY, "YES, I'LL COME."

THIS WEEK I WILL PASS THE HALF-WAY POINT IN MY SECOND TERM AS THE U.S. SURGEON GENERAL. DURING THOSE 6 YEARS, I'VE SPOKEN TO CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND EPISCOPALIAN VESTRYMEN...TO BAPTIST MINISTERS AND PRESBYTERIAN ELDERS...TO MORMON BISHOPS AND NAVAJO MEDICINE MEN.

BUT THIS MORNING'S SPEECH WILL BE MY FIRST FORMAL, INVITATIONAL PRESENTATION TO AN ASSEMBLY OF RABBIS AND JEWISH LAY LEADERS.

SO I WOULD SAY THAT TODAY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN...TODAY IS MY BAR MITZVAH.

I GUESS HOWEVER OLD YOU ARE, IT JUST TAKES AN AWFUL LONG TIME TO GET TO THIS POINT. BUT I MADE IT.

HOWEVER, I MUST CONFESS THAT, FROM WHAT I'VE BEEN TOLD, LAST WEEK AND THIS WEEK WOULD NOT BE EASY WEEKS IN WHICH TO COME OF AGE AS A MEMBER OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

IF THIS WERE MY REAL BAR MITZVAH, I WOULD HAVE HAD TO WRESTLE WITH A PARTICULAR PORTION OF THE BIBLE, THE STORY OF ABRAHAM EARLY IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS...AND TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT...TRY TO MAKE IT A PART OF MY OWN LIFE...AND, THE HARDEST THING OF ALL, TRY TO SING IT IN FRONT OF MY LOVING FAMILY AND CLOSE FRIENDS.

FORTUNATELY, NEITHER YOU NOR I WILL GO THROUGH SUCH AN ORDEAL THIS MORNING. AND I PROMISE TO SPEAK -- NOT CHANT -- THESE FEW PAGES OF REMARKS.

BUT AS I THOUGHT ABOUT THIS BENCHMARK EVENT, I BEGAN TO WONDER JUST HOW MANY MODERN YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN -- JEWISH OR NON-JEWISH AND READING GENESIS FOR THE FIRST TIME -- I WONDERED HOW MANY OF THEM WOULD ALREADY BE QUITE FAMILIAR WITH THE OUTLINES OF THAT STORY.

IT'S THE STORY, YOU REMEMBER, OF A MAN AND HIS WIFE AND HIS NEPHEW -- A KIND OF STEP-SON -- WHO PACK UP AND LEAVE THEIR HOMETOWN IN UR OF THE CHALDEES TO SEE WHAT THE LORD HAD IN MIND FOR THEM IN CANAAN.

THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT ABRAM AND SARAI, AS THEY'RE CALLED WHEN WE FIRST MEET THEM -- AND LOT, OF COURSE -- WERE TOLD IN SOME UNUSUAL AND SUPERNATURAL WAY TO LEAVE TOWN AND GO SOUTH.

BUT YOU AND I KNOW THAT -- EVEN TODAY -- SUCH ABRUPT DEPARTURES ARE NOT UNUSUAL AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE.

IT WAS A CONFUSING TRIP FOR ABRAM'S LITTLE FAMILY NEVERTHE-  
LESS. THERE'S A GOOD DEAL OF WHAT MODERN READERS COULD CALL -- AT  
THE VERY LEAST -- "DEVIIOUS BEHAVIOR" ON THE PART OF ABRAM.

THEY WANDER AMONG STRANGERS, TRYING TO MAKE DO...THEY  
OCCASIONALLY EMBARRASS THEMSELVES -- AND EMBARRASS EVEN US, SEVERAL  
MILLENIA LATER.

AND THERE'S SOME STICKY OPPORTUNISM, TOO, SO THAT -- ALL IN ALL  
-- IT'S A PICTURE OF A NOT UN-TYPICAL MODERN AMERICAN FAMILY.

I WOULD THINK THAT ANY MODERN-DAY YOUNG PERSON READING THIS  
STORY -- ESPECIALLY READING IT IN THE KIND OF ILLUSTRATED BIBLE THAT  
I GREW UP WITH -- WOULD HAVE TO SAY THAT ABRAM AND HIS FAMILY NOT  
ONLY ACT LIKE -- THEY EVEN DRESS LIKE -- THE CHARACTERS IN FALCON  
CREST.

BUT SOMETHING ELSE WAS GOING ON AT THE SAME TIME, AND THAT IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARACTER OF THIS MAN CALLED ABRAM.

AND IN THIS COMING WEEK'S PORTION -- OR SO I'M TOLD -- YOUR CONGREGATIONS WILL BE READING THE NEXT PORTION IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS, THE ONE THAT HAS THAT EXTRAORDINARY PASSAGE -- THE PASSAGE THAT SHATTERS ALL PRECEDENTS IN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE UP TO THAT TIME -- THE PASSAGE IN WHICH ABRAHAM HAS THE "CHUTZPAH" TO BARGAIN WITH THE LORD.

THE LORD WANTS TO DESTROY SODOM, BUT ABRAHAM ARGUES THAT THE LORD MIGHT HAVE TO SAVE THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF NOT-VERY-NICE PEOPLE, IN ORDER TO ALSO SAVE THE LIVES OF AS FEW AS 10 RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE.



I USED THE WORD "CHUTZPAH," BUT I TAKE THAT BACK. ABRAHAM HAD TO HAVE SOMETHING MORE THAN JUST NERVE OR BRAVADO TO ARGUE WITH THE LORD.

AND YOU REMEMBER THAT THE LORD PRESENTS HIS CASE UNTIL, AS THE BIBLICAL WRITER TELLS US VERY LACONICALLY, "THE LORD STOPPED SPEAKING TO ABRAHAM AND WALKED AWAY."

OF COURSE, THE LORD HAD SPOKEN TO ABRAM BEFORE, WHEN THE MAN WAS 75 YEARS OLD, PROMISING TO MAKE HIM A GREAT NATION, TO BLESS HIM, AND TO MAKE HIM, IN TURN, A BLESSING TO OTHERS. THEN, WHEN "ABRAM WAS 90 YEARS OLD AND 9," THE LORD TALKED TO HIM AGAIN AND CHANGED HIS NAME TO "ABRAHAM," THE FATHER OF NATIONS, AND THEY ENTERED INTO THE HISTORIC COVENANT.

BUT DURING THIS LATEST DIALOGUE OVER THE FATE OF SODOM, I THINK THE LORD WAS HEARING MORE THAN JUST BRAVADO AND "CHUTZPAH" FROM THE NEWLY NAMED ABRAHAM. I THINK HE WAS HEARING A NEW VOICE OF AWARENESS, OF COMPASSION, OF HUMAN DIGNITY...CALL IT WHAT YOU WILL...BUT IT WAS CLEARLY A NEW VOICE OF FAITH.

AND I'D LIKE TO THINK THAT, AT THAT MOMENT, THE LORD KNEW THAT ABRAHAM WAS RESPONDING TO HIM IN A NEW WAY...THAT ABRAHAM WAS BECOMING A NEW KIND OF RELIGIOUS MAN...A RESPONSIVE MAN...THE KIND OF MAN THAT RABBI LEO BAECK, IN OUR OWN CENTURY, DESCRIBED AS A "REVERENT MAN."

I'M NOT A BAECK SCHOLAR BY ANY MEANS AND I DON'T PRETEND TO BE. BUT IF ANYONE EXPLORES THE ROOTS OF NAZISM IN GERMAN, AS I DID A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, YOU ARE SURE TO COME UPON THE WRITINGS OF THIS EXTRAORDINARY HUMAN BEING AND BRILLIANT CLERGYMAN.

SO, IN PREPARING FOR OUR CONVERSATION THIS MORNING, I RETURNED TO SOME OF LEO BAECK'S WRITINGS AND I CAME ONCE AGAIN UPON THAT PASSAGE IN MYSTERY AND COMMANDMENT, WHERE BAECK WRESTLES WITH THE MEANING OF "REVERENCE":

"REVERENCE," WRITES LEO BAECK, IS "MAN'S FEELING THAT SOMETHING HIGHER CONFRONTS HIM; AND WHATEVER IS HIGHER IS ETHICALLY SUPERIOR AND, THEREFORE, MAKES DEMANDS AND DIRECTS, SPEAKS TO MAN, AND REQUIRES HIS REPLY, HIS DECISION."

THE "REVERENT PERSON," LEO BAECK SEEMS TO SAY, IS A RESPONSIVE PERSON. NOT SOMEONE WHO WILL MERELY "TALK WITH" THE LORD, BUT -- LIKE ABRAHAM -- WILL "TALK BACK", IF THE ISSUE DEMANDS THAT KIND OF HUMAN RESPONSE. THAT TAKES BOLDNESS. AND SPEAKING VERY PERSONALLY, BOLDNESS IS BORN OF FAITH.

RABBI BAECK WENT ON TO SAY THAT "REVERENCE" IS "THAT WHICH MAN ACCEPTS INTO HIS LIFE AND WILL REALIZE THROUGH HIS LIFE." BAECK SAYS IT IS "THE GREAT IMPELLING FORCE, THE ACTIVE ASPECT OF WISDOM."

ABRAHAM'S ARGUMENT WITH THE LORD IS AN ASTONISHING BIBILICAL EVENT. BUT JUST AS ASTONISHING IS THIS PROPOSITION BY LEO BAECK, THAT REVERENCE AND HOLINESS ARE NOT JUST A COUPLE OF NOTIONS TO SIT AROUND AND CONTEMPLATE.

REVERENCE AND HOLINESS REQUIRE A REPLY, A RESPONSE OF SOME KIND...THEY IMPEL YOU TO DO SOMETHING...PREFERABLY, THEY IMPEL YOU TO TURN WISDOM INTO ACTION.

THAT'S CERTAINLY THE TRADITION OF THIS WEEK'S READING OF THE ABRAHAM STORY. NOT LAST WEEK'S ABRAM, THE STAR OF "FALCON CREST" AND "DALLAS."

BUT THIS WEEK'S GREAT PATRIARCH, THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS AND OF THREE MAJOR RELIGIONS.

AND FRANKLY, THIS IS AN ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TIME TO RECALL ABRAHAM'S SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE MORAL, RELIGIOUS, AND ETHICAL LIFE OF THE HUMAN RACE.

AND I HAVE TO TELL YOU, ON A PERSONAL NOTE, THAT AFTER NEARLY 50 YEARS OF MEDICAL PRACTICE AND A HALF-DOZEN YEARS AS YOUR SURGEON GENERAL, I CAN RECALL FEW OTHER MOMENTS LIKE THE PRESENT ONE, IN WHICH WE NEED TO REMEMBER...TO THOROUGHLY UNDERSTAND...AND TO QUICKLY ACT UPON THAT POWERFUL ABRAHAMIC TRADITION OF REVERENCE IN ACTION...OF HOLY DIALOGUE...A TRADITION OF WISDOM PUT TO WORK.

NOW, I CAME HERE THIS MORNING TO TALK ABOUT AIDS AND I SUPPOSE SOME OF YOU ARE WONDERING WHEN I'M GOING TO GET TO IT. ACTUALLY, I ALREADY HAVE. BECAUSE THE ISSUES I WANT TO DISCUSS THIS MORNING DO CONCERN...

THIS PANDEMIC OF AIDS...WHAT IT'S DOING TO SOME OF OUR PEOPLE...WHAT IT CAN DO TO ALL OF OUR PEOPLE...AND WHAT WE MUST BEGIN TO THINK AND DO IN ORDER TO CONQUER AIDS, THE MOST VICIOUS OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN THE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN RACE.

LET ME CONFESS THAT, IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THIS DISEASE, MEDICINE AND SCIENCE ARE MAKING VERY SMALL HEADWAY, RELATIVE TO WHAT HAS YET TO BE ACCOMPLISHED.

IN FACT, I'LL GO EVEN FURTHER AND SAY THAT THE FINAL VICTORY OVER THIS DISEASE WILL NOT FOLLOW THE PATTERNS OF OTHER SUCH VICTORIES -- THE ONE OVER SMALLPOX, FOR EXAMPLE, OR POLIO.

NO, THIS TIME, THE VICTORY WILL PROBABLY NOT BE THE EXCLUSIVE VICTORY OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE.

THE FINAL VICTORY OVER THE DISEASE OF AIDS WILL MUCH MORE LIKELY SPRING FROM THE IMPELLING FORCE OF COMPASSIONATELY COMMITTED, ETHICALLY MOTIVATED, AND COURAGEOUSLY REVERENT MEN AND WOMEN WITH LITTLE OR NO MEDICAL BACKGROUND AT ALL.

LET ME EXPLAIN THAT OBSERVATION.

TO BEGIN WITH, WE HAVE TO BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT THE THREE BASIC ASPECTS OF THE DISEASE OF AIDS:

FIRST, AIDS IS STILL PRETTY MUCH OF A MYSTERY. WE DO KNOW SOME THINGS ABOUT IT -- HOW IT'S TRANSMITTED, FOR EXAMPLE. AND WE ALSO KNOW HOW IT ATTACKS AND DESTROYS THE HUMAN IMMUNE SYSTEM. BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHY IT DOES THAT AND WE STILL CAN'T PREDICT WHEN THE AIDS VIRUS WILL -- OR WILL NOT -- PROCEED ON ITS DESTRUCTIVE PATH. SO, FIRST ON OUR LIST IS MYSTERY.

BUT MEDICAL SCIENCE DOES NOT THRIVE ON MYSTERY...IT THRIVES ON DISCOVERY. AND DISCOVERY STILL SEEMS TO BE SOME DISTANCE AWAY FROM US.



AIDS IS A MYSTERY...BUT IT'S NOT ONLY A MYSTERY. IT'S AN ENORMOUS HUMAN CATASTROPHE...A DISEASE THAT HAS AFFLICTED NEARLY 43,000 AMERICANS...OF WHOM 25,000 HAVE ALREADY DIED.

BUT YOU CAN HAVE MYSTERY...AND STILL HAVE AFFIRMATION.

YOU CAN HAVE MYSTERY...AND STILL HAVE CONFIRMATION.

AS MARTIN BUBER HAS WRITTEN, "MAN...REQUIRES CONFIRMATION" BECAUSE MAN -- AND ONLY MAN -- HAS POSSIBILITIES.

IF MANKIND IS NOW THE VICTIM OF A HIDEOUS MYSTERY, WE CANNOT GIVE UP ON HIM...WE CANNOT ABANDON HIM FOR THAT REASON. RATHER, AS BUBER GOES ON TO ARGUE, WE MUST AFFIRM HIS LIFE AND HIS CONDITION. WE MUST "LIBERATE HIM FROM THE DREAD OF ABANDONMENT" -- THE DREAD OF ABANDONMENT -- "WHICH IS A FORETASTE OF DEATH."

SO WE CANNOT FORGET THIS FIRST ASPECT OF AIDS...ITS ASPECT OF MYSTERY...BECAUSE DENIAL OF MAN HIMSELF LIES AT THE HEART OF MYSTERY. AND IN THIS TERRIBLE AND FEARSOME PERIOD, I MAINTAIN -- AS A PHYSICIAN, AS A SCIENTIST, BUT ALSO AS A HUMAN BEING -- THAT MAN CANNOT BE DENIED.

AIDS ITSELF WOULD HAVE US DO THAT.

PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN TOTAL FEAR OF AIDS WOULD HAVE US DO THAT.

AND PEOPLE WEAKENED BY THE DESPAIR OF AIDS WOULD HAVE US DO THAT.

BUT WE CANNOT.

IN THE FACE OF MYSTERY, WE MUST AFFIRM AND CONFIRM THE FACT OF MAN ON EARTH.

IN RABBI BAECK'S TERMS, TO DO SO WOULD BE OUR OWN INDIVIDUAL, CONTEMPORARY ACT OF REVERENCE, OUR OWN PERSONAL DEMONSTRATION OF HOLINESS IN ACTION...OF ACTION IN WISDOM.

EARLIER IN THESE REMARKS, I NOTED THAT THERE WERE THREE ASPECTS OF AIDS THAT WE NEED TO CONFRONT AND UNDERSTAND. THE FIRST IS THE MYSTERY OF THE THING, AND I'VE TALKED A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT ALREADY.

THE SECOND FACT ABOUT AIDS IS THAT THE DISEASE IS VIRTUALLY 100 PERCENT FATAL.

I MENTIONED A MOMENT AGO THAT THE DISEASE HAS ATTACKED NEARLY 43,000 PEOPLE SINCE JUNE OF 1981 AND THAT 25,000 OF THOSE PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY DIED.

THAT'S THE TRUTH...BUT THERE'S MORE. THE TRUTH ALSO INCLUDES THE FACT THAT, OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAD AIDS IN 1981, AT LEAST 91 PERCENT OF THEM HAVE ALREADY DIED.

OF THOSE WHO HAD THE DISEASE IN 1982, SOME 87 PERCENT HAVE ALREADY DIED.

OF THOSE IN 1983, 89 PERCENT OF THEM HAVE ALREADY DIED OF AIDS.

AND SO ON.

AIDS IS THE CLOSEST THING IN OUR ENVIRONMENT TODAY TO BEING A "VIRTUALLY 100 PERCENT FATAL DISEASE."

WE HAVE A FEW DRUGS COMING INTO THE MARKETPLACE -- A.Z.T. MOST PROMINENT AMONG THEM -- AND THESE DRUGS HELP PROLONG LIFE A LITTLE BIT...A FEW MONTHS...MAYBE A YEAR OR SO.

BUT WE HAVE NOTHING AT ALL...NOTHING... THAT WILL SAFELY AND EFFECTIVELY STOP THE DISEASE OF AIDS IN ITS TRACKS.

WE HAVE NO DRUGS...NO VACCINES...NO MAGIC BULLETS...NOTHING THAT CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT LIFE-SAVING JOB.

WHAT DO WE HAVE? TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, THE BEST THING AT HAND IS OUR COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE TO CONFIRM THE WORTH AND THE FACT OF MAN.

SOME PEOPLE CALL IT "EDUCATION." OTHERS CALL IT "PUBLIC INFORMATION." AND STILL OTHERS CALL IT "CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING."

ALL THOSE TERMS WILL DO. BECAUSE THEY ARE ALL PART OF THE SAME THING...THAT IS, THE CONFIRMATION OF MAN, WHO IS, AS BUBER POINTS OUT, THE ONLY LIVING CREATURE WITH POSSIBILITIES.

WE NEED TO CONFIRM HIM...TO CARE FOR HIM...AND TO PRESERVE HIM FROM WHAT BUBER CALLS THE "DREAD OF ABANDONMENT, WHICH IS THE FORETASTE OF DEATH." THAT, ALSO, SEEMS TO BE A CLEAR ASSIGNMENT FOR US TODAY.

BUT LET'S GO INTO THIS BUSINESS WITH OUR EYES WIDE OPEN. LET'S GO IN, RESIGNED TO THE FACT THAT -- WHATEVER WE DO -- DEATH WILL COME.

IT'S A GREAT MISTAKE TO UNDERESTIMATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS SECOND ASPECT OF AIDS -- ITS VIRTUALLY 100 PERCENT MORTALITY RATE -- BECAUSE THIS FACT IS ALREADY RAISING THE POSSIBIILITY OF ABANDONMENT IN THE MINDS OF OTHERWISE RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE.

I'VE BEEN HEARING STORIES OF SOME PHYSICIANS AND NURSES -- VERY FEW, THANK GOODNESS, BUT EVEN ONE IS ONE TOO MANY -- PHYSICIANS AND NURSES WHO DON'T WANT TO TREAT AIDS PATIENTS BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF BECOMING INFECTED WITH THE VIRUS THEMSELVES.

THEY KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT SUCH A DANGER IS MINUSCULE...AT THE VERY MOST.

AND WE ALL WATCHED THE TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF THE TRAGEDY OF THE RAY FAMILY IN ARCADIA, FLORIDA...REJECTED AND EXPELLED NOT ONLY BY PLAIN TOWNSPEOPLE BUT ALSO BY EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS.

I THINK THEY MAY BE TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING ELSE...SOMETHING SO CONTRARY TO WESTERN ETHICAL TRADITIONS THAT THEY SIMPLY CANNOT BRING THEMSELVES TO SAY IT STRAIGHT OUT. BUT I THINK THEY MIGHT BE TRYING TO SAY...

"WE DON'T CARE, BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE AS GOOD AS DEAD ANYWAY."

THAT'S A HORRIBLE POSSIBILITY, I MUST ADMIT...BUT IT'S A POSSIBILITY NEVERTHELESS.



I MENTIONED RABBI LEO BAECK BEFORE, BUT MAYBE THIS IS THE TIME TO RECALL ONCE AGAIN HIS NAME AND VENERATE HIS MEMORY.

FOR THIS WAS THE OVERWHELMING QUESTION -- CAN LIFE CONQUER DEATH? -- THAT HAUNTED LEO BAECK DURING THOSE YEARS HE SERVED AS THE RABBI OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP CALLED THERESIENSTADT.

THE LATE LEONARD BAKER WROTE A VERY MOVING BIOGRAPHY OF LEO BAECK WHICH RECALLS WITH GREAT DETAIL THE WAY RABBI BAECK SPENT HIS DAYS AT THERESIENSTADT...SEEING HIS FRIENDS AND FAMILY SHIPPED OFF TO THE GAS-CHAMBERS OF AUSCHWITZ...KNOWING THAT HE HIMSELF WAS ALSO LIVING ON BORROWED TIME...THAT HE, TOO, WAS SERVING A DEATH SENTENCE, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD COMMITTED NO CRIME WHATSOEVER AGAINST ANY HUMAN BEING.

THE TRADITION OF LEO BAECK IS CERTAINLY A TRADITION OF WISDOM IN ACTION...A TRADITION OF PLEADING WITH THE LORD EVERY DAY FOR THE SAVING OF ONE MORE RIGHTEOUS LIFE...EVEN IF IT MEANS PROLONGING THE LIVES OF MANY WICKED PEOPLE AS WELL.

LEO BAECK REFUSED THE OFFER OF THE RED CROSS TO GET HIM OUT OF THERESIENSTADT AND AWAY TO SAFETY. HE WOULD NOT ABANDON HIS PEOPLE ...NOT EVEN THE LOWLIEST AMONG THEM.

AND IN THE END, WE CAN BE THANKFUL, LEO BAECK HIMSELF WAS NOT ABANDONED EITHER.

AND THIS IS THE KIND OF MESSAGE EACH OF US, TOO, MUST DELIVER TO THE WORLD EVERY DAY. THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH FROM THE DISEASE OF AIDS SHOULD NOT -- BY ITSELF -- CAUSE THE VICTIMS OF AIDS TO BE ABANDONED AND, THEREFORE, GIVEN THE "FORETASTE OF DEATH."

WE HAVE NO REASON TO LET THAT HAPPEN.

SO THERE IS THE MYSTERY OF AIDS.

AND THERE IS THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH FROM AIDS.

AND FINALLY, THERE IS THE THIRD ASPECT OF THE DISEASE OF AIDS...THE ONE THAT TAKES US RIGHT BACK AGAIN TO THE LAND OF CANAAN AND TO THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN IN THE DAYS OF ABRAHAM AND LOT.

THE THIRD ASPECT OF THE DISEASE IS THIS:

PEOPLE GET AIDS BECAUSE THEY DO THINGS THEY OUGHT NOT TO DO.

AS I'M SURE YOU KNOW BY NOW, THE MAJORITY OF THE VICTIMS OF AIDS -- ABOUT 66 PERCENT OF THEM -- HAVE BEEN HOMOSEXUALS OR BISEXUAL MALES. FOR SEVERAL TERRIBLY TRAGIC YEARS A GREAT NUMBER OF THEM ENGAGED IN CERTAIN HARMFUL SEXUAL PRACTICES WITH MANY ANONYMOUS PARTNERS.

THE WORST OF THESE PRACTICES, FROM A MEDICAL POINT OF VIEW, IS ANAL INTERCOURSE, ALSO KNOWN AS SODOMY.

FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL REASONS, THEY OUGHT NOT TO HAVE DONE THAT. BUT IT IS APPARENT THAT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF AMERICANS ARE RENDERING THE SAME VERDICT FOR CLEARLY SOCIAL AND MORAL REASONS:

"THOSE MEN DID SOMETHING THEY OUGHT NOT TO HAVE DONE. AND SO THEY GOT AIDS."

BUT THIS THIRD ASPECT OF THE ISSUE OF AIDS IS EVEN MORE COMPLICATED THAN IT SEEMS.

IN ADDITION TO THE 28,000 HOMOSEXUALS AND BISEXUAL MALES WHO HAVE HAD AIDS, WE MUST ADD THE 10,000 DRUG ADDICTS WHO HAVE SHARED DIRTY NEEDLES AND OTHER PARAPHERNALIA AND, BY SUCH ACTIONS, SPREAD THE DISEASE OF AIDS EVEN FURTHER.

AND ONCE AGAIN, THE VAST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS DON'T "SHOOT" DRUGS EITHER, BELIEVE ME. NOR DO THEY LIKE ANYBODY WHO DOES.

IN ADDITION, OF THOSE DRUG ADDICTS WITH AIDS, THERE ARE 4 BLACKS AND HISPANICS FOR EACH WHITE PERSON. SO THERE IS YET ANOTHER ELEMENT OF SOCIAL RANCOR AND DIVISION THAT FILLS OUT THIS THIRD ASPECT OF AIDS.

IN OTHER WORDS, 90 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE DISEASE OF AIDS CONTRACTED IT BECAUSE THEY DID THINGS THAT MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE OUGHT NOT TO BE DONE:

THEY EITHER RECKLESSLY ENGAGED IN SODOMY OR THEY SWAPPED DIRTY NEEDLES WHILE "SHOOTING" DANGEROUS DRUGS.

NOW THAT THEY HAVE THE DISEASE, IT IS A VIRTUAL CERTAINTY THAT THEY WILL DIE.

AND THE REST OF US WILL BE WITNESS TO THEIR DEATHS, YET WE WILL HAVE NOTHING AT HAND TO PREVENT THOSE DEATHS.

BUT THE QUESTION I MUST ASK IS THIS:

"WOULD WE NEVERTHELESS WORK FOR AND PLEAD FOR THEIR LIVES? IF WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY, WOULD WE HAVE A DIALOGUE WITH THE LORD TO SAVE THEM ALL, AS ABRAHAM DID FOR THE INHABITANTS OF SODOM?"

IT SOUNDS LIKE A THEORETICAL QUESTION...SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT WHILE YOU'RE GETTING YOUR DOCTORATE IN DIVINITY.

BUT IT'S NOT THEORETICAL AT ALL...AT LEAST NOT FROM MY PERSPECTIVE AS SURGEON GENERAL.



SOME DAY, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A BIOMEDICAL CURE FOR AIDS. WE'LL HAVE A VACCINE THAT IS BOTH SAFE AND EFFECTIVE AND IT WILL BECOME GENERALLY AVAILABLE.

BUT WHO SHOULD BE THE FIRST PEOPLE TO GET IT? MY GUESS WOULD BE THOSE VERY SAME PEOPLE WHOSE BEHAVIOR WE DON'T PARTICULARLY LIKE...THE ONES WHO DO THINGS THEY SHOULDN'T DO...THE ONES WHO PUT THE REST OF US THROUGH TIMES OF TERRIBLE TRIAL.

WILL WE BE ABLE TO DECIDE THAT? I HOPE SO...BUT I'M NOT REALLY SURE WE'RE READY YET.

LIKE IT OR NOT, WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF AN EPIDEMIC THAT IS TESTING NOT ONLY OUR CAPABILITIES IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE...BUT IT'S ALSO TESTING OUR CAPABILITIES AS HUMAN BEINGS WHO HAVE BEEN RAISED IN -- AND WHO ARE PRESUMABLY STILL COMMITTED TO -- THE AFFIRMATIVE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL TRADITIONS OF ABRAHAM.

THOSE TRADITIONS HAVE BEEN HANDED DOWN TO US BY PROPHETS AND TEACHERS.

THOSE TRADITIONS HAVE BEEN LIVED BY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WHOSE NAMES WE WILL NEVER KNOW, BUT WHO MUST HAVE LIVED THAT WAY FOR US TO HAVE ARRIVED AT THIS POINT AT ALL.

AND THOSE TRADITIONS HAVE BEEN LIVED BY SOME PEOPLE WHOSE NAMES ARE QUITE WELL KNOWN AND REVERED...PEOPLE LIKE LEO BAECK AND MARTIN BUBER...AND RAOUL WALLENBERG AND DIETRICH BONHOEFFER...AND MOTHER THERESA AND POPE JOHN XXIII.

THIS IS NOT AN EASY TIME FOR US, EVEN FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE HAD THE TRAINING AND THE EDUCATION AND THE PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT AND SO ON.

HOW MUCH HARDER, THEN, IS IT FOR OUR NEIGHBORS TO BE HOLY AND COURAGEOUS...TO BE WISE...AND TO BE INVOLVED?

RABBI SCHINDLER, I CAME HERE AS YOUR SURGEON GENERAL, NOT AS YOUR CHAPLAIN, NOR DO I PRETEND TO THE VICAR'S ROBES AND CROWN.

BUT SOMETIMES THOSE OF US IN PUBLIC HEALTH WILL RECOGNIZE A DISEASE FOR WHICH MEDICINE ITSELF CAN OFFER ONLY A PARTIAL CURE, WHILE THE SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL STRENGTH OF SOCIETY MUST COME UP WITH THE REST.

I BELIEVE THAT AIDS IS SUCH A DISEASE AND, THEREFORE -- YOU AND I -- WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO...TOGETHER.

LET ME, THEN, CLOSE WITH A FEW WORDS DRAWN, ONCE MORE, FROM THE WRITINGS OF LEO BAECK. THEY COMPRISE A VERY TOUGH-MINDED IDEA, AND I THOUGHT THEY WOULD MAKE AN APPROPRIATE FINISH TO THE WORDS I'VE OFFERED YOU THIS MORNING.

RABBI BAECK WROTE...

"THE FUTURE WILL SIGNIFY THE RIGHT OF THE PRESENT; THE FUTURE  
WILL GIVE ITS TESTIMONY FOR WHAT THE PRESENT REALLY IS."

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, LET US PRAY VERY HARD AND WORK VERY HARD FOR A  
GOOD OPINION...FROM OUR COLLECTIVE FUTURE.

THANK YOU.

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