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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.

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~~ ^A 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 lenti 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,

