

28.
METZKA
1981

Many people speak ill of others because they hate themselves. They are dissatisfied with themselves so they have to blame someone for it. Instead of looking at themselves they have to blame others.

The story about the man who wanted to perform in a rodeo. The very first time he got on a bucking horse he was thrown off and knocked unconscious. After the doctors worked on him for a while he awoke and said, "My father is going to be very proud of me now". The doctor asked, "Oh, did your father want you to be in a rodeo?" He said, "No, he wanted me to have my head examined".

In this week's Torah portion we learn about a strange disease called leprosy. It is not the modern day disease of leprosy which is incurable which is called Hanson's disease but it was a different disease. The Rabbis say it came upon a person because of loose talk, gossip, slander. The punishment for this offense was to contract this disease and be forced to live outside the camp. If we analyze what really makes us human, it is speech, the ability to communicate with one another. It is this ability which sets us off from the other animals. The other animals cannot talk. They cannot express their feelings and their thoughts. They are not even equipped for it physically. They do not have a larynx. It is true that they have tried to teach chimpanzees to talk and they have succeeded in teaching some of them sign language, but they express only basic needs; food, shelter, etc. They really cannot use language in an abstract or conceptual way. Man is the only one who can communicate and based upon this communication we have families and societies and nations, etc. Words are a very precious thing. They allow us to establish relationships. If they are misused then they destroy. They destroy by eliminating trust in human relationships. Trust is essential if we are to live as families and communities. A person once came to me a few years ago and asked me why nobody seemed to like him. I hesitated to tell him the truth, but eventually I had to. He used words as a seapon. He thought that if people did not answer him back they agreed with him. It usually just meant that they were so mad they just chose not to answer. He thought that with words you could twist people to do things which they should not do and which would actually be harmful to them. One of the greatest lies that was ever said was, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me". Words hurt and we have to be careful how we use them. This plague was said to turn the hair white and to appear to be deeper than the skin. Some people use words to scare us or to appear deeper than they really are. We must learn not only to talk, but also how not to talk. For some reason today people think they have to let it all hang out but sometimes we should not say things. That's why I believe we begin the reading of this week's Torah portion by learning about childbirth. After all, what does childbirth have to do with gossip and slander? What's more, why after a woman gave birth did she have to bring a sin offering? She committed no sin. In Jewish eyes having a child is the greatest blessing.

The answer the Rabbis give is because childbirth is painful and many times a woman would say things in childbirth that she would later regret, like she is never going to come near her husband anymore, or she hates children and she may curse G-d and her family, etc. We live in a world in which there is suffering. Nothing is 100% easy and good, but we have to be careful not to scare people away from the good things in life. Parents who tell their kids how hard marriage is, difficult and painful, stop their kids from marrying. Parents who tell their kids how hard school is may stop them from getting a good education. Parents who constantly harp about how hard kids are stop their kids from having children. Life is not easy but we have to keep our perspective. When we fail to keep our perspective then we are to bring a sin offering. Unfortunately, this is the great problem of the media today. They always zero in on the hardships of any worthwhile enterprise and they discourage people from doing what is right. I remember a friend of mine who was unfortunately suffering from cancer. One day he cut his hand very badly and had to go to the hospital and get stitches. It hurt quite a bit and all he could think about was his hand. Because he concentrated so much on it he skipped several chemotherapy treatments and he lost his life. By his concentration on a momentary painful experience he jeopardized his whole life. Many times we, too, with words jeopardize relationships and even our whole life. The Holocaust, itself, began with words, with lies which exaggerated and highlighted basic human weaknesses. It exploited people's frustrations, latent hatreds. Words are what made possible the Holocaust. We have to be very careful with words because words cannot only build. They can destroy. That's why politicians are not respected because they play around with words. Of course, they have a hard job to bridge the gulf between peoples' dreams and reality, but they have to be careful with their words. In the Middle East today it is clear that the PLO wants to destroy Israel and wants all its Jews dead. No amount of words can paste this over. We have to make sure that the words reflect reality and not just some diplomat's brilliant use of ambiguous phrases. We must make sure that words do not lead to another Holocaust. I am reminded of a story of the time when Margaret Thatcher, Andropov, and Ronald Reagan appeared before G-d. Margaret Thatcher asked G-d what did He think of the war in the

TAZRIA-METZORA 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PA GE THREE

Falklands. G-d said, "You know, Margaret, if you had had several thousand more soldiers there in the beginning the war would never have occurred and all the soldiers died in vain". Margaret heard this and went into the corner and started to cry. Andropov then asked G-d what did He think about the war in Afghanistan. G-d said, "This war shows the bankruptcy of communism and is going to go on for a long time with a lot of casualties". Andropov then went into the corner and started to cry. Then Ronald Reagan asked G-d what did He think of his Mid-East Peace Plan. G-d then went into the corner and started to cry. Let us be careful with our words when to say them and when not to say them, and let us hope and pray that they will never again bring a Holocaust.

28.
METZORA 1984
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In this week's Torah portion, Metzora, we learn about the disease of leprosy. This disease is not the same disease which we call leprosy today. The leprosy that we have today is known also as Hanson's disease and is an incurable disease. We have some of it in Texas because it is transmitted by armadillos. It is a good idea not to handle armadillos too much. The Rabbis tell us that this disease not only attacked human beings but houses as well. It was a disease which did not require a doctor to diagnose, but a Kohen, a priest. The Rabbis say that this was a disease which was produced by Motzi Sheimra, by evil talk, by gossip. The punishment for speaking evil was to be put out of the camp. Words are what hold people together. All society is based upon words. Words are what build trust, hope, security, and assurance. When our words maim and hurt they destroy society and they destroy institutions. No relationships can last if there is no trust. Promises made and not kept lead to disillusion and frustrations. How can you deal with people if they do not keep their word? How can you deal with people if every time they tell you something they lie? This leads to great frustration and even violence. One of the roots of family violence today is the failure of the couple to deal with each other in truth. This, of course, is what makes infidelity so bad. The lies and the coverups destroy trust. Some people are even pathological liars. They believe they are telling the truth when they are lying all the time. You cannot reason with people like this. Frustration becomes unbearable and violence is the result. If this happens to governments or people cannot have their voice heard they rise up and take arms. If it happens in a voluntary institution people leave in droves and it collapses. If it happens in a marriage the people either divorce or violence occurs. Words are a wonderful thing, but they can also be a terrible thing and the punishment for misusing words is self-imposed. A person who uses biting sarcasm is shunned by others. That person becomes lonely and is left to his own devices. If certain people in an institution start deriding others their deriding brings division. This year we are commemorating the 50th yearzeit

of a great Jewish leader who was known as the Chofetz Chayim. Actually, his real name was Meyer Cohen. He made his great reputation by one of his early books called Chofetz Chayim: Who Wants Life? This is a quote from the Psalms. It says, "Who wants life? One who guards his tongue from evil.", "Notzor L'Shono Me'ra". We are not supposed to say everything. Even if things are true we are not supposed to say bad things about someone for no reason. If he is applying for a job or about to marry someone and we are called as a reference, then perhaps we can say something, but otherwise no. People have a tendency to criticize too much. In fact, in the United States today we have a false concept that the greatest man is the greatest critic. The greatest man is not the one who does the most good things, but the one who can criticize the most. This tradition started with H.L. Mencken and goes on today. It is a foolish idea because excess criticism can destroy and not build. There is a time for criticism and there is a time to be quiet. The enemy of the better is the best. Things can always be better. Nothing is ever perfect and it is easy to throw potshots at someone, but we should not do it. One of the worst things is when a person who has done 99% of the things right or 95% or 92%, but all he hears is why didn't he do the 1% or 5% or 8% right. It reminds me of the child who came home with all A's and his mother looked at the report card and said, "Why didn't you make all A+'s?" The child was crushed. The child should have been complimented. The enemy of the better is the best. They tell the story of the Chofetz Chayim who was walking in his town of Radin when a stranger appeared and asked him if he knew the great Rabbi, the Chofetz Chayim. The Rabbi looked at him and said, "He isn't such a great Rabbi." The man said, "I am talking about that great Tzadek, the Chofetz Chayim." The Chofetz Chayim looked at him and said, "He isn't such a great Tzadek. I know him real well." At that point the stranger got very agitated and slapped the Chofetz Chayim across the face for speaking bad about that great Rabbi. About a half hour later the stranger happened to come into the Shul where the Chofetz Chayim was teaching

and when he saw who it was that he just slapped he almost had a heart attack and fainted. He did not know what to say. The Chofetz Chayim looked at him and said, "My son, you were right. We are not allowed to talk Loshon Hora, evil things, about yourself either." The terrible damage that words can do to institutions, to all relationships is well known. The phrase "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me" is one of the greatest lies that was ever written. Of course, we should express our opinion but we have to know when to do it, how to do it, and we have to give people credit for all the good things they have done otherwise we will isolate ourselves and destroy our institutions. I am reminded of the story about a French Consul, an English Consul, an American Consul, and a Russian Consul who were all talking and expressing their opinion on many subjects. The Russian was sitting quietly. The American said, "Don't you have any opinions?" The Russian replied, "I have many opinions." The American asked, "Why don't you express them?" The Russian said, "I have many opinions, but I do not agree with them." Sure, everybody should have opinions and we should express them but not in a destructive way. We should not destroy with words. We should give people credit for what they have done and compliment them. We should always remember that the enemy of the better is the best.

METZORA 1985
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Metzora we learn about the ceremony that the leper performs with the Kohen after he becomes clean. It is interesting to note that the Kohen only tells a person when he is unclean and when he becomes clean. He does not prescribe any remedies for the person's leprous condition after he determines he is a leper. It is up to the person to cure himself.

This is one of the reasons why the rabbis say that this disease is a spiritual disease. The priest can point it out, and he can tell when it is cured, but it is up to the individual, himself, to cure himself. This is true today, too. A rabbi cannot force anybody to do something they do not want to do. All he can do is talk.

A rabbi can offer classes, speak from the pulpit, but he cannot force anybody to come to shul, and he cannot force anybody to send their kids to Hebrew school, he cannot force them to keep their shop closed on Shabbos or keep kosher or live like a mensch. They have to do it themselves.

When the person who has suffered from this spiritual disease, which the rabbis say came upon him because he spoke Loshan Horah, gossip, about others, it is interesting to note that there were two procedures he went through. First, he was to take two pigeons. He was to slaughter one over running water, and he was to dip the living bird in this blood and then let the bird go. This, of course, symbolizes what happens when a person says Loshan Horah. Not only does that person destroy the reputation of others and destroys trust, the living water which holds society together, but he also sets in motion forces over which, many times, he has no control. The lies have a life of their own.

METZORA 1985

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE TWO

Many times we see how politicians start out by smearing their opponents and, by so doing, create an atmosphere in which people start to look in their background and all the dirt from their own lives comes out, like the case of the congressman who was yelling about homosexuals very loudly so people should not look and find out he was a homosexual, or like the office in which I once worked where there was a man who was always yelling, "There is a thief here," and there was. It was him, but by his actions he tried to shift the spotlight away from himself. I remember, too, 20 years ago when a man came to me very upset about an officer of the congregation whose son was married in a church. He wanted to have this officer removed. I told him, "What are you blaming the officer for?" It was the son who did it, not him, and, sure enough, ten years later his own son was married in a church.

Many times we start things and do not know where it will end. Why, though, does a person tell Loshan Horah? If we look carefully at the sacrifices the person has to bring when he is clean we will perhaps understand why. He has to bring an Oshom, a guilt offering, Chatos, a sin offering, and an Olah, a burnt offering. The rabbis teach us that he brings an Oshom, a guilt offering, because he is guilty before G-d for what he has done. The sin of gossip is a terrible sin also against G-d because it disrupts human relationships, and it does not allow people to fulfill G-d's purposes of helping us build a better world. He brings the Chatos because of the sin he committed, even the unintended effects of the sin, but why should he bring the Olah?

The rabbis say he has to bring the burnt offering because the reason he speaks Loshan Horah in the first place is because he feels inferior.

He feels his arguments are inferior. He cannot make his point any other way, so he feels that he must finagle and manipulate because he has no inner confidence. The Olah is meant to signify to him that he should elevate himself. He should have better thoughts about himself. He should not feel inferior. A person, if he has confidence in his arguments and his presentations, should not resort to tactics of destroying another person's reputation in order to win a point or ignore the truth in order to win a point.

Inferiority is the source of Loshan Horah. All of us should feel confident in our abilities and then we would not have to resort to Loshan Horah. We find, too, many Jews who feel inferior to others so, therefore, they spread bad stories about themselves and their religion. They do not have any self-respect. For example, there are many comics that really just reinforce anti-Semitic stereotypes by their feelings of inferiority, by their twisted humor. Comics and Woody Allen and Joan Rivers end up by spreading lies whose consequences may even affect them. People do not respect others who do not respect themselves. I have even been told of certain Jews in town who sit on important community organizations and when the community organization suggests that, because of their sensitivity to Jewish feelings, affairs be held on Saturday night instead of Friday night, these Jews complain and say, "No, let's have it on Friday night." They feel inferior and spread evil gossip about their own people.

This reminds me of the story of two Jews who were stranded on a wild island. One turned to the other and said, "Listen, I'm hungry and I'm going to go eat some of that bacon tree over there." The other man said, "You can't do that. You're Jewish. Besides, I never even heard of a bacon tree." The man replied, "Yes, there is and I'm

METZORA 1985
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE FOUR

going to have some." He returned a short time later with three or four arrows in him. His friend said, "What happened?" He answered, "That's a hambush." We Jews, if we do not show self-respect for ourselves, spread gossip and evil stereotypes which come back to haunt us. That's what happened in Germany, and we do not want that to happen here.

Detachment, Sensitivity & Lashing Out

APRIL 1986
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Mezuzah

In life we must all have a certain amount of detachment even from our own problems and from ourselves if we are to function well in life, if we are to have the ability to solve our problems and to help other people solve their problems. One of the reasons why many people fail in life is because they are too sensitive, too sensitive to themselves and to their own needs. This not only blinds them to the needs of others, it also causes them to blow their own problems way out of proportion and, thus, fail to correctly assess ~~the situation~~ ^{their problems} so that they can take the correct remedial action. Their constant dwelling on themselves, on their problems causes them to lose perspective and to be completely insensitive to the needs of others.

A few years ago a couple came to see me. The wife seemed very worried about her husband, and she was constantly hovering over him. It turned out that he had allergies, and she was terribly concerned lest he become uncomfortable. He matter-of-factly accepted all this attention and did not give it another thought. Later I learned that this woman had been suffering from cancer for over a year. The man went on and on about his allergies and how it affected him so badly, and the woman sympathetically concurred with every word he said.

No mention was ever made of the fact that she had cancer and would probably not live too much longer while he, with his allergies, would probably live a long time. His total concern with himself blinded

him to his wife's problems. I wonder ^{often} if, when she ^{did} ~~will~~ get bad, ^{whether or not} he ^{would have} ~~will~~ ^{even} ~~consent~~ ^{to} feed her or help her, or ^{whether} ~~will~~ his allergies ^{would have been} ~~so~~ ^{overpowering} that he ^{would} ~~will~~ not be able to do anything for her, and she ^{that} ~~will~~ ^{would have} ~~have~~ to call a friend ^{or} of a taxi ^{even} ~~even~~ to go to the doctor or to the hospital.

In life those people who are extremely sensitive lose all sense of proportion and usually end up making terrible decisions which bring them nothing but grief. How many people do we all know who have quit good jobs because of some imagined insult, or who have told everyone off because of some fancied grievance. There are so many people who have denied themselves so much of life because they will not go to a place which might be too hot or too cold or which might have insects or smell bad. In Judaism we are supposed to be sensitive but not overly sensitive. An unlimited preoccupation with a person's self is a disease.

In the Torah portion Metzora we learn about such a disease, a disease which in English we call leprosy but which is not modern leprosy. Modern leprosy is an incurable disease known as Hanson's Disease and does not resemble the disease that is mentioned in the Torah. This disease is curable and, according to the rabbis, has a spiritual cause. The rabbis say that this disease came to a person when he spoke "Loshan Hora", when he brought forth evil gossip against his neighbor. It is hard to understand why a skin disease was chosen to be the punishment for a person who spoke ill of others. Perhaps we can understand it if we examine what skin is.

Skin is composed of many layers, and the top layer is dead. If the top layer of our skin would be alive, we would be in constant pain. We could not touch anything, grip anything, lift anything or even kiss or hug ^{our} ~~or~~ loved ones without writhing in pain. The pain would be excruciating. We need to have this outer layer of dead skin if we are to interact with the world. We need to have a certain detachment

when we deal with life. This applies to both the physical and spiritual realms. Unless we have this detachment, we will always be in pain, if not physical pain then psychic pain. Our lower levels of skin are alive and do contain nerves. This, too, is absolutely necessary. We all need to have a certain amount of sensitivity to ourselves and our problems. However, we also need to put some distance between ourselves and our problems. Just as our dead layer of skin allows us to interact with the physical world, to stand moderate temperatures, touch abrasive surfaces, feed ourselves, walk on the ground, etc., so a certain level of detachment is necessary if we are to interact with others.

In life we must have this certain detachment. We cannot always be sensitive. An especially sensitive person cannot function in this world. He becomes filled with pain, which causes him to always want to strike out. This is the principal reason why people speak ill of others. They are in such pain from their over-preoccupation with themselves that they have to lash out. Excessive sensitivity to oneself leads to great unhappiness. We all know how hypochondriacs, who dwell on every pain and twinge, harm themselves. Of course, one has to be sensitive to warning signals of disease but an excessive preoccupation with oneself leads to great aberrations. A person becomes so sensitive to the remarks of others that he constantly sees insults when there are no insults.

That's why concerning the disease of leprosy the Torah says that if the priest would find that all the skin had turned white, the

leper shall be declared clean, but "if there is just a white spot on the skin, the priest shall declare the leper unclean". In other words, in the first instance, the individual had some real complaint. He was not being overly sensitive and, therefore, he was clean in a spiritual sense while, in the second instance, his complaint was really not justified. He was being overly sensitive and, in a spiritual sense, he was unclean. A person must have a certain amount of detachment from himself and his problems. If he does not have that detachment, he will not be able to solve his problems or function in life. People who do not have this detachment constantly lash out at others because they are in such great pain. Every little thing sets them off. They become angry for no reason or for little reason. They are always unhappy, and they end up isolating themselves from everyone. Just as a doctor or a lawyer or any professional cannot be effective if he becomes too emotionally involved with his patients/clinets, so, too, any individual, if he becomes too emotionally involved with himself or his problems, will never be able to solve them also.

On Shabbos Hagadol we read how Eliahu Hanovi, Elijah the Prophet, will "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers". It is hard to understand why Eliahu Hanovi was chosen for this role. He was a firebrand who became overly emotionally involved in trying to solve the problems of the people of his day. His approach ultimately failed; ~~and~~ he did not succeed in convincing the people. In fact, near the end of his life he fled to the desert and asked G-d to remove him from life because his job was just too painful. G-d then informed him that "He is not to be found in the whirlwind or in the earthquake or in the fire but in

APRIL 1986

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE FIVE

the still, small voice".

Elijah then went and commissioned Elisha to proceed with G-d's work of making this a better world. Elisha was much more successful than Elijah because he was able to view things with more detachment. He was able to meet the people where they were and to raise them up to high levels. Elijah realized that the path he chose was not the correct path. Being only sensitive to G-d's demands of the Jewish people and being sensitive only to his great desire to see that they would meet those demands was not enough. He also had to see where the people were, to realize why they were acting the way they were acting and try to correct them from where they were.

That's why it says, "He will be able to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers." Usually each generation is only sensitive to their own needs. They do not realize the needs of the next generation or the previous generation. They only relate and are sensitive to the problems which grip them and not to the problems which have gripped or are now gripping another generation. Elijah says to them, "I have learned how to become more detached, how to look at not only my problems but the problems of others. If I can do it, you can do it, too."

This is also one of the main reasons why we eat matzah on Pesach. Leaven is a symbol of overripe emotion, or our not having the necessary detachment to correctly judge our situation so that we can solve our problems. The matzah we eat on Pesach is not puffed up like bread and is meant to teach us to look at things with a certain detachment,

that even in our moments of greatest triumph we must not become overbearing and treat our oppressors like they treated us. The word "matzah" can also mean "to extract, to express, to drain out". We should extract, drain out an excessive preoccupation with just ourselves and learn to express measured and settled opinions. That's why a form of the word matzah ^{Hismatzah}, means "to settle accounts".

When you settle an account, you look at all the factors involved ^{to} and determine what is to be paid ~~taking all factors into consideration.~~

This we must do, too, ~~when we deal with others, but especially~~ when we deal with ourselves. Perhaps that is why this disease is called "metzora" which can be read as "matza ra - ^{also} matzah is bad". When a person feels it is bad to have a certain sense of detachment ^{about} ~~from~~ himself and his problems ~~and that he should concentrate only on himself,~~ then he is spiritually sick. He suffers from matza ra, metzora.

This is a very serious disease because when a person becomes overly sensitive to himself he cannot live in this world without great pain, and this great pain causes him to constantly lash out at others.

^{In the seder}
~~One of the things that we praise G-d for in the seder is not only~~
~~on~~ our redemption, "Ge'ulasainu", but also ^{for} the redemption of our souls, "Pedus Nafshainu". G-d, on Pesach, not only took us out from physical slavery; He also took us out from spiritual slavery by teaching us that if we want to live a wholesome and happy life we must learn to eat matzah. We must learn how to have a certain sense of detachment in life even ^{about} ~~from~~ ourselves. The alternative is to live a life as a metzora, as a leper, as one whose overconcentration on himself

APRIL 1986
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE SEVEN

causes him to lash out at everyone and to eventually become isolated from everybody and everything. May each of us always remember that the little layer of dead skin is what allows us to live a life without pain. May each of us always be able to put everything in the right perspective, and may our sensitivity to ourselves never blind us to the needs of others or cause us to so blow things so out of proportion that we are doomed to live lives of constant pain. None of us has to live life as a leper.

METZORA 1995
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Tazria we learn about the laws of leprosy. The rabbis say that this was a special kind of disease which came upon people when they spoke Loshan Hora. This disease was not just confined to a person's body. If a person had this disease he had to go outside the camp, but it also could break out in a person's clothes, and we learn that this type of infection or fungus was very dangerous, in a certain sense, at least spiritually, and that the clothes sometimes had to be burned if these clothes were not cured, if the disease that was in these clothes was not remedied. We learn that the Kohan was commanded that he should wash this plague, and he should keep this clothes head up for a second seven days. And afterwards the Kohan should see after the clothes were washed and, behold, if the plague had not changed its appearance and the plague had not spread, it is unclean and in fire it shall be burned. We all know that we portray images to the world of how we like to appear. We all cloak ourselves in different types of garb, and the garb we cloak ourselves in is very important. We know that when Arafat came to the United Nations with his gun it meant something. We know that when we use a clenched fist as a symbol of defiance that it means something. We know that the way we present ourselves by our words and by our dress means something very important. Therefore, the rabbis are teaching us something very important when they say that after the garment was washed and after that particular place on the garment in which the plague was found was washed and if it did not change its appearance that, therefore, this garment is unclean and is to be burned in fire.

We all know that the image that we portray is crucial especially when we are dealing with other people, and what does it mean, the rabbis say, when it says it did not change its appearance? The rabbis say that the word Anod means not only appearance but also stands for the letter Ayin in the word Negah. The word Negah is spelled Nun, Gimme1, Ayin, and Hofak means to overturn, and if we take the word Negah and we put the Ayin in the front instead of in the back

the word becomes Oneg, a joy. When Sadat wanted to make peace with Israel, and, of course, Sadat was an enemy of the Jewish people for a long time. After all, he was the one who started the Yom Kippur, but when he decided that the Jewish people are no longer a plague in his midst but a joy in his midst, an Oneg, he came to the Knesset and he spoke comforting words and he talked about peace and about brotherhood and he made the Jewish people feel that he really wanted peace. He did not talk about a partial peace or a treaty which was going to be broken at the first opportunity. Therefore, the Jewish people in Israel felt that they could make peace with him, and they eventually did make peace with him, and they were willing to make great sacrifices to make peace with him, but if we look at Arafat that is not the case. Arafat still talks about Israel as being a plague among his people and not a joy among his people. He compares the Jewish people to that Jewish tribe Kuwarish, who Mohamed made a treaty with but only temporarily, and then when their guard was down Mohamed completely wiped out the tribe. Arafat to this very day still speaks about destroying Israel in stages. He talks about the fact that those suicide bombers are martyrs for the Palestinian people. He says, "We are all suicide bombers." When the members of his own Fata perform terror acts against Israel what he does is that he does not condemn them or reprimand them, he promotes them, so knowing all these facts, how Araft has never turned over one terrorist to Israel, who Israel has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt has committed different typews of acts, how he has allowed his police force, which was supposed to be 9000 men, grow to 17,000 men, how he own police chief talks about recapturing Tel Aviv and Haifa and Bet Shan, cities that are not on the West Bank, on Gaza, what are we to make of it? We have washed the garment. We have washed them clean. We said he was a new type of a leader, but is he if he still speaks the same words, if he still says the same Loshan Hora, if he still cloaks himself in the same words and in the same garments and he still talks more about war

than he talks about peace? He has not clamped down on Hamas. What are we to make of all this? Even his own people are tired of him. A study was made recently, a poll in Gaza, and 53% of the people would prefer Israeli rule. There are many big question marks about Arafat. In fact, there is a story that is going around Gaza, and that is that one day Arafat is presiding over a meeting of his cabinet when all of a sudden he gets a frantic call from his wife, who says, "You have to do something. You have to do something, Arafat." He said, "What is the matter, my dear?" She said, "There are thieves in the house. I'm scared. There are thieves in the house." Arafat said, "Calm down, calm down, just a minute." He puts the phone down and counts all the members of his cabinet. He said, "Honey, you have nothing to worry about. All the thieves are here." These type of stories illustrate the fact that the Palestinian people, themselves, know that Arafat is corrupt and know that he is not producing the goods for them. Arafat, instead of being conciliatory, as Sada was, has come out with his old rhetoric. The Palestinian covenant has not been changed, so the question remains: we have washed him clean but he still considers us a plague, he does not consider us a joy. Until he considers the Jewish people a joy in the Middle East, a fit partner for him and his people in order to make terrific progress for the future, then we are in for trouble. Let us all hope and pray that the people in Israel will realize it, and let us hope and pray that Arafat, himself, will change, because if he does not change then we are in for terrible times. Let us hope that if he does not change the other Arabs will come to the fore among the Palestinian people who will recognize the fact that Israel is a joy and not a plague so that there truly can be peace in the Middle East and so that truly there will be no more terrorist acts and truly that both peoples can live together in harmony so that peace and brotherhood and compassion and love will reign even in the Middle East. Amen.

METZORA 1997
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The Torah portion that we read today was Metzora. In this Torah portion we learn the procedures that a leper goes through when he becomes cleansed of his leprosy and the different sacrifices that he has to bring. We also learn about a different kind of leprosy. We learn about a leprosy which attacks the person's house. In the previous Torah portion, Tazria, we learn about the leprosy which attacked the person's person and his clothing, and here we learn how leprosy could even attack his house. We know, of course, that the rabbis say that this leprosy came when people spoke Loshan Hora, when they gossiped about their neighbor, when they spread malicious truths even about the neighbor. In Judaism Loshan Hora does not mean that the material is not true. It could be true, but it could be spread maliciously. We all know that just because something is true does not mean it should be said. As I have said many times here from this pulpit, because it happened a few years ago in this town, that a youth group was meeting and one boy came in and approached a 16 year old girl and said, "When did you get out of Shadows Glen?", which, of course, meant, when did you get out of the insane asylum. The girl, of course, turned red, became flustered, started to cry, and ran out of the room. The boy had no business saying that to her. It was the truth but it was an inappropriate truth. We all know that many times people say things when may even be true, but there is no reason to say them. They just want to hurt somebody. We know that the truth can hurt much more than a lie, especially if it is not needed because nobody has to know. For example, telling the truth about someone's past 30 years ago when they were sentenced to jail but since then they have had no problems whatsoever, or to talk about how somebody was questioned by the police because of some defective product they made 20 or 30 years ago. Why should we have to bring this up? Of

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

course, it is true that if a person needed to hire somebody, he needed to know certain things about their background, but, generally, the truth is no defense when it comes to Loshan Hora. We are not called upon to say things about people, and, unfortunately, this happens. Unfortunately, people talk bad about others for no reason. They many times make up the stories but sometimes the stories are the truth but they have no bearing at all on the situation and they should not be told.

In this week's Torah portion we learn about how when the Jewish people come to the land of Canaan that "I am giving to you as a possession and I will give the plague of leprosy in the house of the land of your possession." We know that "the house" in Hebrew can mean institution, not just a literal house. After all, this is called Beis Keneset, the House of Assembly, the Synagogue, or Beis Tefilah, the House of Prayer, or Beis Midrash, the House of Learning. We know Beit Sefer means a school. Bayit in Hebrew means an institution, and many times we know that different institutions in our society can become rotten. Many institutions can develop leprosy. They can do things that they should not do. In this country we know that. In this country we have a great suspicion of the police, and for good reason, because we have had years of experience of how policemen will go wrong. This started in England, of course, with the Magna Carta, and we know that many times the police can be misused, and, therefore, we are very careful in this country to make sure that the police do not mix into things which are not their business, but we have to be constantly vigilant. That is, of course, what the Bill of Rights is about. The Bill of Rights guarantee that we will be

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

free from unreasonable searches and seizures. The police need subpoenas, and you may not think that this is a problem today, but I can tell you that wiretapping goes on now, and much of it is unsupervised, and especially with the latest equipment, they can just drive by your house and pick up all your conversations. We all know, too, that many times the police have their own axe to grind. After all, they have a quota of how many arrests they have to make, cases that have to be cleared, and we know that the pressure on them is enormous.

Sometimes it is easier for them to frame somebody, to intimidate witnesses than it is to actually go find the true killers. After all, we just had an illustration of this this week when a person that was on deathrow for 10 years and the judges finally let him go because they said that the witnesses that had testified were intimidated. Therefore, he was deported to Mexico. We saw that in the OJ Simpson trial, how Mark Furman admitted in a tape that he gave to an author that the police in Los Angeles many times fabricated evidence and even beat their suspects. We know that police brutality is something that exists and has to be watched. Therefore, in this country we are very, very careful that on a police report alone a person is not brought to trial. The police can make a report but it has to go to the prosecutor and then the prosecutor has to make a recommendation and in this country even that is not enough. You have to go before a grand jury and during all these steps and procedures none of this information is to be leaked out, and if you leak information, you can go to jail. Nobody is to see the results of a grand jury investigation unless an indictment is rendered, because otherwise you are spreading Loshan Hora about somebody. You are ruining their reputation. You are saying things about them that are so flimsy that no charges can be

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

leveled against them in a court of law. This is why we need to have these types of protections. That is what this Torah portion is talking about. When you have an institution which can slander and destroy and harass people; therefore, you have to be very careful. Remember, the police cannot take you in and question you unless there is probable cause. Otherwise, they could harass you. That is why there are so many rules in this country about excluding evidence because otherwise they can come in and take anything they want whenever they want, as has happened in this past... That is why we know that we need these protections.

It says, "And it will come to him and he will come to one who owns this institution and he shall tell to the Kohen saying, 'It seems that there is a plague in this house.'" In other words, the police, themselves, cannot make this determination. They are in charge of the institution but they can say, "It appears to us that there is." Somebody else has to make this connection, this interpretation of the facts that this person is worthy of being brought to trial and being indicted. The police have their own axe to grind. I remember I learned that very early on. It was 1955 and I was invited to a wedding of one of my friend's brothers in Los Angeles. After he got married he was going to go on a honeymoon to Hawaii with his bride. He asked his brother and I to drive his car back to Seattle. Of course, in those days there were no superhighways, but California was a progressive state and they had two lane highways but every once in a while they would branch out into four lane highways and then you would be able to drive for a few miles and pass the cars you had to pass and then go

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

back to the two lane road. We were young and adventuresome people and we thought that the 55 mile speed limit was not reasonable. We came to one of these four lane stretches and started to pass a lot of cars. In fact, the last car we passed was probably going 60 miles an hour. As soon as we came back to the two lane highway, we heard a siren and a police car pulled us over as well as the car we had just passed. He saw Fort Ord stickers all over the car and asked, "Are you boys soldiers going back from the base to your home?" We said, "No, no, we are theological students." Then he said, "Boys, you have to be careful. Next time, don't go so fast," and he waved us on. As he waved us on, he took out his ticket book and wrote a ticket for the car that we had just passed. Now, of course, that is a good story because we did not get a ticket, but I wonder what the fellow in back of us thought. After all, policemen have a certain amount of discretion that they can utilize, and many times this discretion can be used in the wrong way. It can be used to benefit friends or to gain favors. Therefore, this is the way of the world. Many of the policemen, themselves, are young and inexperienced. We know that the police, themselves, have to be watched, that those who protect us have to be watched, too. We need the police and I am not trying to say anything which says that we should not have police, but the police have to be watched. Therefore, in this country we have all sort of safeguards. You cannot be charged with a crime just based on a police report. You cannot be charged with a crime even on a prosecutor's report. All this information has to go before a grand jury, and if it is leaked to the press beforehand, you can be charged yourself, the one who leaked it, with a crime and be sent to jail.

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The reason I am mentioning all these things is because of the situation in Israel today about Netanyahu. I am not discussing the merits of the case here, but I am saying that someone in Israel leaked the police report to the media five minutes before the main news program. Immediately the airwaves were filled with this, and it was as if he was already guilty. The police report is usually only given to the prosecutor and it is supposed to be secret, even in Israel. Of course, we all know that in Israel, itself, the police are like the police everywhere. After all, as I have said before, the police have been used many times by different political parties. Even in the United States, we remember Bull O'Connor who stopped the march in Summer. He was used by his politicians to stop the march and probably even acted according to the law, the law as it was written there even though it was very unjust. We know how police have been used to break up labor organizing drives. We know that the police in this country were used to break strikes. We know that many times the police can be used for different purposes, and in Israel it is no different. You have to watch the police, too. We always thought that if we had Jewish policemen, they would be different, but they are only marginally different. After all, some of these same investigators who were investigating Netanyahu are being investigated themselves for wiretapping. We know in Israel, too, just recently the police reported in a case on one of their own who had at a demonstration beat up a 67 year old woman very badly, and their report said this policeman should not be indicted because it was of no public interest. Of course, the attorney general overruled them and is going to prosecute this case. We know many times, too, that when people get reported to the police for different infractions, that the police immediately claim

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

that these people had assaulted them and try to intimidate them so that they should not bring their complaints to the police headquarters. The policemen in Israel are like the policemen everywhere else, and, therefore, they have to be watched. We, in America, have had much experience with these matters, and that is why we have such a sensitive idea as to protecting the rights of the individuals against even the police. This is something Israel is new at, but Israel, too, should learn that they have to be wary of police arrests because police arrests can be very arbitrary. You know that I speak many times against Meretz because I do not have much use for them, however, I have to praise them because in the last Knesset they got a law passed which made sure that defendants cannot be held in jail more than 24 hours before being brought before a judge. It used to be 48 hours, and, in fact, there used to be a law in Israel that they could hold you for 15 days before you even got a chance to get a lawyer. I think that they have changed that now so that you get a lawyer almost immediately. This is, of course, to the credit of Meretz who saw that that law got passed. The police, like all other police, want to crack cases and they many times will put pressure on suspects to admit to things that they really did not do. I think that it is very important that we realize what is going on in Israel now is just a police report. The prosecutors have not indicted him, and even if he was indicted, so what? He has a right to stand to his day in court. After all, in the United States many politicians have been indicted and some of them have gotten off. We know about all these things. A man has a right to have his day in court, and in Israel the cases presented against public figures have not been too successful. There was just one against the cultural minister, and, of course, the court threw out the case against him saying

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

there was no case whatsoever, and several mayors have had this happen, too. So, there is no guarantee of anything just because the police file a report against them. I think that this is very, very important to know. The police many times have their own axe to grind and they are not always right. There are many other factors that have to be taken into consideration, and a police investigation is just one of them.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man and a woman who went to a doctor. The woman requested that her husband stay outside as the doctor examined her. Of course, there was still a nurse in there with the doctor. As the man was standing outside, the doctor came out just a couple of minutes later. He went to a nurse and asked, "Nurse, do you have pliers?" She said she did and gave him a pair of pliers. A few minutes later he came out and said, "Nurse, do you have a screwdriver?" She said she did and gave him a screwdriver. Two minutes later he came out and said, "Nurse, do you have a hammer?" She said she did and gave him one. By this time the man was beside himself. He went up to the doctor and said, "Doctor, what's the matter with my wife?" The doctor said, "I don't know. I haven't been able to open my bag yet." We all know that things are not always the way they seem, and the policemen are not judges or people who are always right, based upon the evidence. After all, they have a vested interest in closing cases, and many times the evidence they present is not true evidence. To their mind it could be true, but when it is looked at from a broader perspective of the law and of all the circumstances, many times their cases and evidence is thrown out. I think we have to remember that we have to watch those who

METZORA 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

protect us because they, themselves, are fallible. They, themselves, make mistakes. Let us all hope and pray that we will all do this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day.

Amen.