

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THE MONEY IN YOUR BANK ACCOUNT?

PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS

HaRav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l and HaRav Aharon Leib Shteinman zt"l would often send people seeking a yeshuah, a salvation, to Rav Shimon Galai. A widow once came to Rabbi Galai and said, "Please promise me. I need a yeshuah." "I cannot promise," he said. She said, "But people say you can bring yeshuos. Miracles happen for you." He replied, "I cannot make miracles. I can only say one thing about myself. I have tried my best to make sure that my mouth will not say one word of lashon hara." (Pesach Newsletter of the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation).

When a person speaks *lashon hara*, derogatory speech, it impacts his words of Torah and prayer. Sometimes, it prevents his prayers from reaching Heaven. On the other hand, when one is careful not to speak *lashon hara*, his prayers are more powerful!

On *Yom Kippur*, the *Kohen Gadol* would bring the *korban Ketores*, a mixture of spices which he would burn on the golden altar, which was in the *Kodesh HaKadashim*, the Holy of Holies, in the *Bais HaMikdash*.

This was a special *korban*. It could only be performed by the *Kohen Gadol* and only on *Yom Kippur*. It was done in the sacred area of the *Bais HaMikdash* which even the *Kohen Gadol* was forbidden to enter, save on *Yom Kippur*.

The **Talmud** (Yoma 44A) teaches that the *ketores* offering atoned for the sin of *lashon hara*. It is noteworthy that the very first sin for which the *Kohen Gadol* had to achieve forgiveness on behalf of the Jewish People, on *Yom Kippur*, was the sin of *lashon hara*. **Rav Avraham Pam** zt"l (Messages from Rav Pam by Rabbi Sholom Smith) quotes the **Chofetz Chaim** zt"l who points out that this teaches us the **grave seriousness of the sin of *lashon hara***. The *Kohen Gadol* had to first counteract the prosecuting angel who condemns the Jewish People for their careless

and improper speech. Once that sin was rectified, then the *Kohen Gadol* was able to strive to obtain forgiveness for the other sins of the Jewish People.

"No man shall be present in the Tent of Meeting when he comes in to atone for the Holy [Sanctuary] until he leaves. He shall atone on his behalf and on behalf of his household and on behalf of the entire assembly of Israel." (Vayikra 16:17)

Lashon hara is the source of many social ills. It has caused the dissolution of many friendships and marriages. It has generated immeasurable suffering. It causes hatred, jealousy, and disputes. The evils of *lashon hara* are universally recognized. Yet, due to various rationalizations, people condone making derogatory comments.

Our second *Bais HaMikdash* was destroyed, and we are still in exile lasting over 2,000 years! What sins have been the primary cause for our continued exile? What do we have to rectify? The **Talmud** (Yoma 9B) details *lashon hara* as the cause of the continued exile. The main sin to correct is the speaking of *lashon hara*.

Every word of *lashon hara* is a sin, in of, itself. With each word spoken, one may violate numerous positive AND negative commandments! The gravity of speaking *lashon hara* is compounded with each word & sentence one utters! One who is not careful with his speech can violate the prohibition thousands of times in a short while.

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

Midrash Rabbah (98:19) asks, “Why are our tongues are compared to arrows, more so than other weapons?” The **Midrash** answers that other weapons cause harm at the spot of the attack. Arrows, however, can cause harm a great distance away. With the touch of a button on a computer or smartphone, one can reach millions of people. Do we really want to use that power to spread slander about someone? **Once the harmful word is said and sent, it can never be retrieved! The harm caused can never be undone!**

Moshe Rabbeinu could not understand why the Jews were suffering so terribly in Egypt. The **Sifsei Chachamim** (Shmos 2:14) explains that Moshe knew Hashem had already told our forefather, Avraham, that his children would be slaves and would suffer affliction for 400 years. That, however, did not explain why the Jews had to suffer so horrifically or why the servitude was so harsh. Then something happened which opened Moshe’s eyes to the answer as to why this was happening to the Jews. One day, Moshe uttered Hashem’s holy name to justifiably kill a cruel Egyptian taskmaster. The following day, Moshe attempted to stop two Jews from fighting. Immediately, one of the two Jews said to Moshe, “Do you intend to murder me as you had murdered the Egyptian?” (Shmos 2:14) Moshe was taken aback. He said to himself, “Indeed the matter is known!” **Rashi** says Moshe realized that his act of killing the Egyptian was known to others. **Rashi** quotes the **Midrash** explaining that now Moshe understood why the Jews were suffering so terribly in Egypt. “Now, I understand why the Jews are deserving this” because they are speaking *lashon hara*, slandering fellow Jews. In fact, those two Jews slandered Moshe to Pharaoh. Moshe would have been killed by Pharaoh had Hashem not miraculously saved him.

The Jews were on the 49th level (out of 50) of impurity. They served idols (**Midrash**). With all that, Moshe

could not understand why the Jews were suffering terribly. Once Moshe saw that there was also the sin of slander, then he understood. The **Chofetz Chaim** zt”l (Shmiras Halashon; Part 2 perek 4) quotes a **Zohar**. The **Zohar** explains that *lashon hara* awakens accusations in heaven against the Jewish People. Apparently, other sins, even serious ones, do not have the power to bring accusations against the perpetrator and the Jewish People as a whole. Once *lashon hara* is spoken, it enables all the other sins to “accuse” the Jews. That is what the pasuk means, “*Indeed the matter is known!*” The *lashon hara* “opened the door” for other sins to prosecute the Jewish People. It allowed the serious sin of serving idols to stand in accusation against the Jews. Now Moshe understood why the Jews deserved such harsh treatment by the Egyptians.

The sin of speaking *lashon hara* is very severe, especially if one habitually speaks *lashon hara*. The Chofetz Chaim zt”l (Shmiras Halashon; Sha’ar Zechira perek 3) quotes the **Chovos Halevavos** by **Rabbeinu Bechaya** (Sha’ar Hachniya perek 7, at the end of hasiman hashlishi) who writes about the terrible shock that awaits one who habitually speaks *lashon hara*. He says that after a person dies and is judged he will be shown the mitzvos and sins that he had done during his lifetime. He will notice, to his great chagrin, that **many mitzvos that he had done in his lifetime are no longer there**. In addition, there will be sins recorded that he had never done. What happened?!! **When he habitually spoke *lashon hara* about another person, his mitzvos were transferred to that person. In addition, that person’s sins were transferred to him.** It was as if *he had \$100,000 in his bank account. He went to make a withdrawal, to use the money as a down payment on a house. When he gave the teller the withdrawal slip, she told him that he only had \$20 left in the account.*

We should refrain from speaking or listening to any negative comments about others. We should learn the laws of shmiras halashon, guarding our mouths,

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to know what we are permitted to say and what we are not. May our efforts facilitate peace in the world and the speedy rebuilding of the Bais HaMikdash!

Some basic information to be aware of:

- 1- You are forbidden to make a derogatory comment even if it is true.
- 2- Any comment, even if not derogatory, that may cause financial loss, physical pain, or mental anguish is considered lashon hara.
- 3- Even negative writing, hand motions, or facial expressions can be lashon hara.
- 4- If you say something derogatory and then say that you were just joking, it is considered lashon hara.
- 5- You may not even say lashon hara to a close relative or a spouse.
- 6- If it is needed for a constructive purpose you are obligated to say it, but you must meet the 7 conditions listed below.

- 1- You must be 100% certain that the information is accurate.
- 2- You must be 100% certain that a wrong has been committed.
- 3- You must first approach the wrongdoer to persuade him to correct his behavior, unless it will make things worse.
- 4- When telling it over you may not exaggerate at all.
- 5- Your intention must be solely to help the one who was victimized and not because you harbor ill will towards the perpetrator.
- 6- You should try to first solve the problem without having to speak lashon hara.
- 7- You may not say it if your words will cause more harm to the perpetrator than allowed by the Torah.

When in doubt what to do, ask your rav or call the Shmiras Halashon hotline

of the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation, 718-951-3696.

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A summary of the 7 Rules to permit speaking lashon hara for a constructive purpose:

Check out the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation website, <https://cchf.global/>, for easy-to-read books, short video clips, etc... to become more familiar with the laws of *shmiras halashon*

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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