

Guarding our Speech

שומרי הלשון

SHOMREI HALOSHON



DAILY LEARNING PROGRAM

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A Peddler of Poison

Rule 1:

לא תלך רכיל בעמך - You should not go from person to person like a peddler "selling" gossip (ויקרא י"ט:ז).

Understanding the Rule

You are not allowed to say anything negative about another person. The Chofetz Chaim discusses two types of negative speech. One is called *loshon hora*, and the other is called *rechilus*.

Loshon hora is anything negative a person says about someone else.

Rechilus is anything a person says which will make the listener become upset at someone.

For example, if you tell a person that someone tried to hurt him or spoke *loshon hora* about him, your words are *rechilus*.

The following story will demonstrate how *rechilus* can come about.

Peddling No-Goods



Levi closed his notebook and glanced at David.

"Let's take a little break, okay?"

"Sure," David replied. They went down to the kitchen to get a snack.

"Chaim called while you were upstairs," Levi's mother said.

Levi made a face. "Boy, he knows how to be annoying! Doesn't he know I'm busy today?" he told David. "He can be such a pain sometimes."

The next day at recess, David saw Chaim in the hallway. "I've got to tell you something," he whispered. Chaim was curious.

"Don't think Levi's your good friend. When you called yesterday he said you were being annoying and can be a pain at times."

Chaim's face got very red.

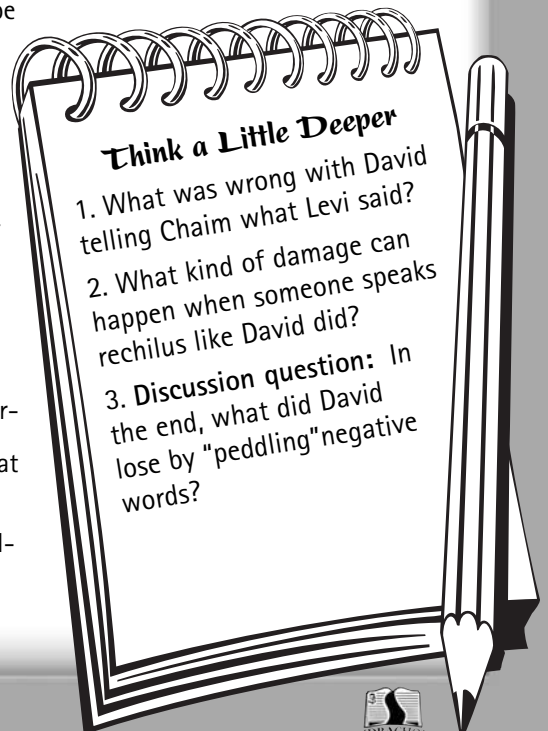
"Whaaaaat?!" he gasped. "That's what Levi said about me?" He turned on his heels and stomped out to the playground.

After recess, both Levi's and Chaim's faces were stormy. David felt a little bad when he saw how upset they were.

"Chaim has a right to know what Levi said about him," David reassured himself. "At least he'll be my friend—after all, I did him a favor by telling him about Levi's true feelings."

Summer vacation began soon afterwards, and the next time David saw his classmates was at their Shabbos Pirchei group. To his surprise, there sat Levi and Chaim, talking happily. It was obvious that they must have made up. But when they spotted David, they both turned to give him an angry look.

David froze and as they turned away to continue their conversation. He realized how wrong he had been to try and break up their friendship.



Think a Little Deeper

1. What was wrong with David telling Chaim what Levi said?
2. What kind of damage can happen when someone speaks *rechilus* like David did?
3. Discussion question: In the end, what did David lose by "peddling" negative words?

Hear No Evil

Rule 2:

לא תשא שמע שוא - Do not accept to a false report (שמות כג:א).

Understanding the Rule

One may not speak or listen to loshon hora and rechilus. Not only does the Torah say we may not speak loshon hora or rechilus (even if it's true); we may not listen to it or believe it either. Even if we cannot make people stop speaking loshon hora, we have to do all we can to avoid hearing it.

Spoiled Fun



he fifth-grade classroom exploded with cheers as Rabbi Berman announced the annual trip.

"We'll be leaving at 7 a.m. sharp to Ari's Bowling 'n Fun Park—the only kosher amusement park in the state! Don't forget your caps, sunscreen, and plenty of drinks—it's hot out there," he reminded the boys with a smile.

"I can't believe it! We're gonna have a blast!" enthused Ephraim. "My cousin went there and he said it was incredible." The boys filed out of the classroom.

"Hey—wait up Shmuel!" called Moshe, his neighbor who was in sixth grade. "What's all the excitement?"

"We're going to Ari's Bowling 'n Fun Park for our class trip," explained Shmuel. "It's going to be amazing."

Moshe made a face. "Amazing? I wouldn't bet on it. Not with the way Ari runs his place. Last year when we went, one of the rides was broken, the bowling lanes didn't have automatic scoring, and to top it all off, they only had two flavors of ice-cream!"

"Really?" Shmuel felt his enthusiasm slip away.

"He doesn't run the greatest place on earth, that's for sure," said Moshe with authority.

Shmuel arrived home looking unhappy.

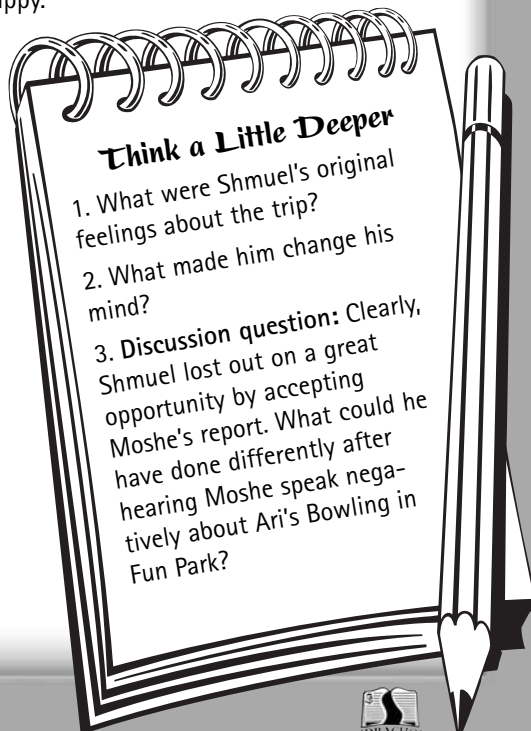
"I don't think I'm going to go on the class trip," Shmuel told his mother when he got home. "It's just a waste of money. I'd rather have a day off to myself."

Moshe's words rang in Shmuel's ears the entire next day, which he spent doing practically nothing and feeling very bored.

On Wednesday morning when Shmuel came to school, his friends crowded around him.

"Shmuel! What happened? Why didn't you come? We had such a blast yesterday."

Shmuel couldn't find an answer. Not for them and not for himself.



Think a Little Deeper

1. What were Shmuel's original feelings about the trip?
2. What made him change his mind?
3. **Discussion question:** Clearly, Shmuel lost out on a great opportunity by accepting Moshe's report. What could he have done differently after hearing Moshe speak negatively about Ari's Bowling in Fun Park?

Preventive Medicine

Rule 3:

השמר בנגע הצרעת - Beware of the disease of tzara'as (דברים כד:).

Understanding the Rule

The Torah teaches us that the punishment for speaking loshon hora is tzara'as – a skin disease. A person who was stricken with tzara'as became impure and had to stay separate from the whole community. He had to do teshuvah and go through a long process to become pure again. Even though people do not get tzara'as anymore, this verse teaches us to be as careful with our speech as we would be if we could still get tzara'as.

An Ancient Punishment



Yehudah walked through the dusty streets, deep in thought. In the distance, the Bais Hamikdash shone with great splendor, a magnificent House in which the Shechinah rested. Sometimes, Yehudah would bring his water jug and sit on a tall hilltop, gazing at the Mikdash from afar to bask in its holiness. Today, however, Yehudah was troubled.

"Yehudah!" he heard a shout behind him. Chanina ran quickly up the winding path, trying to catch up.

Yehudah smiled despite his sad thoughts. "Slow down," he said, "I'll wait for you. There's no need to rush."

"Thank you," Chanina said breathlessly. "I wanted to see how you're doing—I mean, it must be very hard..."

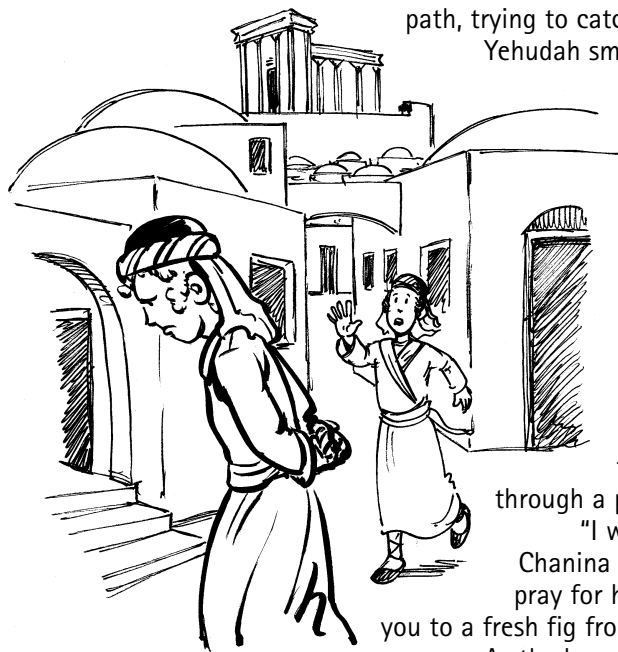
Yehudah sighed. It was no secret

that his older brother had gotten tzara'as, a result of the sin of speaking loshon hora. Now Ezra had to be away from the rest of Klal Yisrael until he recovered from the tzara'as and went through a process of purification.

"I wanted to suggest,"

Chanina said shyly, "that we both pray for him and then I will treat you to a fresh fig from our orchard."

As the boys stood together, praying for Ezra, Yehudah thought—for the thousandth time that day—about the seriousness of the sin of loshon hora. With tears in his eyes, he begged Hashem to save him from falling into the trap of speaking forbidden words.



Think a Little Deeper

1. Why did people get tzara'as?
2. When tzara'as existed, how do you think people's view of loshon hora was different than it might be today?
3. Discussion question: Today, we do not have tzara'as. How else can we remind ourselves about the seriousness of loshon hora?

Partners in Crime

Rule 4:

ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל - Do not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person (ויקרא יט"ד).

Understanding the Rule

Jf someone were blind, it would be very cruel to put a block down on the floor in front of him to cause him to trip. The Torah uses this example to teach that you are never allowed to cause a person to hurt himself, especially by causing him to break a Torah law.

Someone who speaks or listens to loshon hora is putting a stumbling block in front of others. If you speak loshon hora, you are making someone break a Torah law by hearing your loshon hora.

If you listen to loshon hora, you are also causing someone to hurt himself. If you would not listen, the speaker would have no one to talk to and he would have to stop.

A Trip with a Trip



hat a great day for a fishing trip!" Ari told Pinchas on the first day of summer vacation. "Just peace and quiet and some beautiful scenery—it's a dream!"

The boys sat together on the dock, holding their rods. Ari began to doze off in the sunshine.

He was awakened when Pinchas suddenly burst out laughing.

"Hey—what's so funny?" Ari asked, startled.

"I'm just remembering Nosson's face on the last day of school when he found out he failed math," said Pinchas.

"He failed?" Ari couldn't resist asking. "But he tried so hard."

"F-a-i-l-e-d," spelled out Pinchas

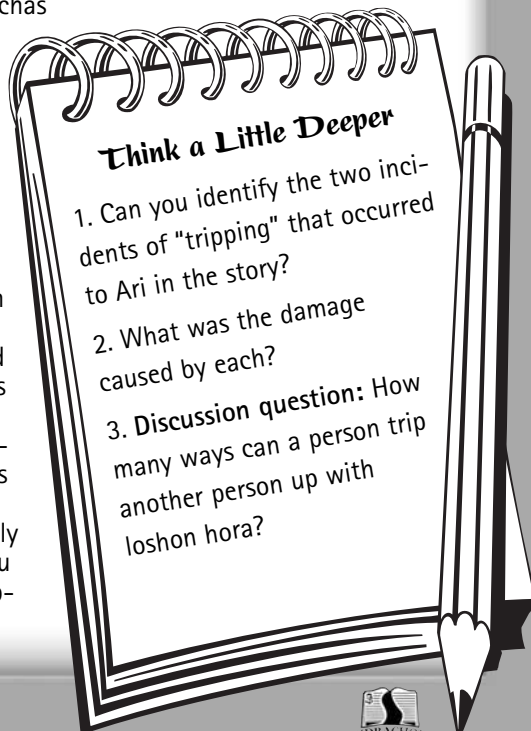
firmly.

"Whoa—that's terrible," said Ari. "I guess I'm glad I didn't study with him when he asked me to."

"Some people are smarter than others, if you know what I mean," said Pinchas.

Just then, Ari felt a jerk on his rod. As he stood up to reel in the fishing line, he tripped over...Pinchas' thermos and lunchbag. Ari landed on his knees, and his fishing rod fell into the lake. The fish—if there had been one—was now long gone.

"Hey!" Ari said angrily to Pinchas. "Why don't you be more careful about tripping people up!"



Think a Little Deeper

1. Can you identify the two incidents of "tripping" that occurred to Ari in the story?
2. What was the damage caused by each?
3. Discussion question: How many ways can a person trip another person up with loshon hora?

Weekly Review 1

Rule 1:

One of these statements is loshon hora and one is rechilus. Which one is loshon hora?

- "Kalman, did you know that David isn't so smart?"
- "Kalman, David told me you're not so smart."

Rule 2:

True or False:

You are allowed to listen to loshon hora if you don't add anything to the conversation.

Rule 3:

What punishment does the Torah give us for speaking loshon hora?

- Death
- Tzara'as
- Pay a fine

Rule 4:

Speaking loshon hora can be compared to placing a stumbling block in front of a blind person because

- You are causing someone to hurt themselves by doing a sin.
- The heart of a person who speaks loshon hora is hard like a stone.

Shabbos Story

Week One: Rules 1 – 4

Who Wants Life



he Talmud relates that Reb Alexandri called out: "Who wants life? Who wants life?"

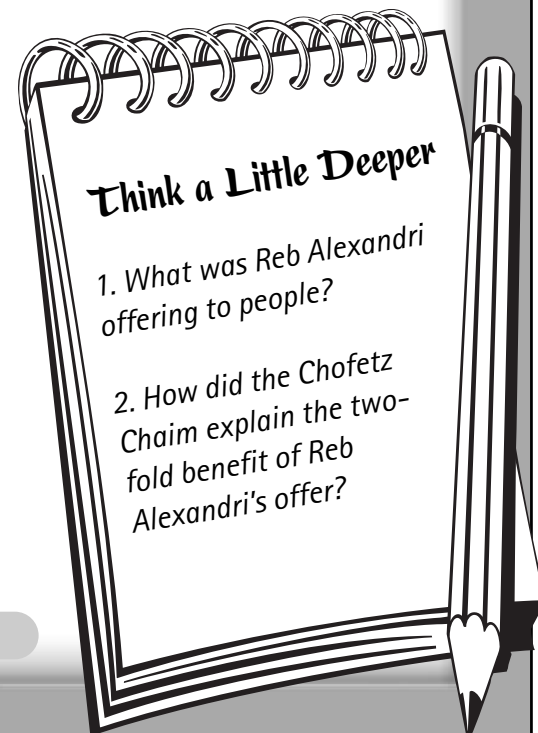
A large crowd soon gathered. They said to him, "Give us life!" Reb Alexandri told them a quote from Tehillim ...נצור לשונך מרע... (תהלים לד:יג:יד) מי האיש החפץ חיים... נצור לשונך מרע... "Who is the man who desires life and loves days that he may see the good? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit ..."

At first glance this seems confusing. What new idea did Reb Alexandri share with the people? He merely said over a posuk that they already knew.

The Chofetz Chaim explains what happened: When the people first heard Reb Alexandri's offer of life, they thought he was selling a drug or medicine that had the power to make a person's life span longer. But he showed them a spiritual drug that can actually give a person long life in this world, as well as Olam Haba. (It is worth noting that the Chofetz Chaim lived for almost one hundred years.)

Every single word of loshon hora is a separate aveirah, and this is multiplied by the amount of mitzvos violated by that piece of loshon hora. If someone speaks only ten words of loshon hora a day, over a year he will have spoken thousands of words of loshon hora. In fact, someone who doesn't watch himself from loshon hora can speak hundreds of forbidden words every single day.

On the other hand, if a person is careful, he earns a mitzvah for every moment that he holds back from speaking loshon hora. Since we are dealing with such an enormous amount of mitzvos, we can understand why not speaking loshon hora has a special power to give life.



Registration Form

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