



EXAMPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE LISTENING

HALACHAH:

TO PREVENT OR RECTIFY DAMAGE: One may listen to loshon hora in order to prevent damage that may be done to himself or others (i.e., warning someone to stay away from a dishonest person,) or to rectify damage that was done (i.e. to return stolen items.)

EXAMPLE:

• **Rochel:** “I know who borrowed Chevy’s notes and didn’t return them. She’s just too embarrassed to tell Chevy that they got really crumpled. She’d rather not return them at all! And, there’s no way she’s ever going to listen to me if I tell her how unfair she’s being.

Leah: “Tell me who it is and I’ll take care of it. I’ll figure out how to convince her.”

Rochel: “I’ll tell you, because I know I can trust you to take care of it and not breathe a word to anyone else.”

Come in!”
“Hi, Rivky,” Shira greeted her cousin as she walked into her aunt’s house and into the living room. “How are you doing?”

“Shira!” Rivky looked up from her book. “So good to see you! I’m great. So how are you? What’s happening with you these days?”

Shira drew a deep breath and announced, “I’m making a day camp this summer.”

“Wow! That is major!” Rivky was impressed, having undertaken this rather challenging task last year. “You’re doing it in your house, right?”

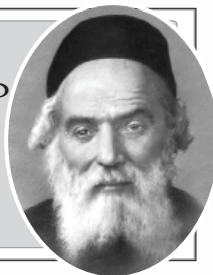
When Shira nodded, Rivky continued to question her. “So, let’s see, you have a place... you have toys? Nosh? Schedule? Sprinkler? Pool? Cell phone? Medical forms? Assistant...crafts, stickers... prizes...smocks... music... yes? Wow, you’re really prepared! So... who’s coming?”

“Well, let’s see. Most of the girls are from my neighborhood, and then there’s a few others. The Rosenbergs are sending a child, and the Kleins from Fifth Street, plus they have cousins staying with them –”

“Did you say the Kleins?” Rivky looked serious. “Is that the one that has twin girls? Five years old? Yeah?” Rivky looked down and considered before continuing. “Don’t spread this; I’m only telling you because it’s important for you to know. Last year I had those twins in my day camp. Everything was fine until it was time to pay. It was just one excuse after another... I never got paid for those two girls. I’ve heard that it happened to other people too... I never checked it out because it wasn’t relevant for me anymore, but I think you should know.”

Shira listened quietly. Yes, this did sound like something she should know... and should check out.





HALACHAH:

TO RELIEVE EMOTIONAL PAIN: It is permissible to listen to someone who needs to express his anger or frustration in order to relieve his emotional pain. If the person is having difficulty in coping with the pain, then expressing his feelings – even if it involves loshon hora – is considered l'toel. Providing someone with empathy and understanding is an act of chesed.

NOTE:

- One should not allow the speaker to go on about other faults of the subject that are irrelevant.
- One may not accept what he hears as fact. (The guidelines for not accepting are defined earlier.)
- If one feels that he can help the listener view the subject in a better light, he is obligated to do so.
- If the speaker is too upset at that point, but may be open to hearing a limud zechus at a later point, one should try a while later.

EXAMPLE:

- “How could she say such a thing?!” your friend says, in tears. “I’m not talking to her again. Never.”

You respond, “That’s really hurtful... I don’t know how I would handle it if I were in your shoes. Is it possible she just wasn’t thinking? Maybe she was very stressed out about something else... Who knows?”





EXAMPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE LISTENING

HALACHAH:

TO HELP BRING SHALOM. One may listen to loshon hora if his intent is to help the speaker see the subject of the conversation in a more favorable light or to help calm the speaker so that he won't talk to others about the subject.

EXAMPLE:

- **Shuli:** "I am ready to cry... How could she?! Sora Baila of all people! I just can't believe it!"
- **Yaffa:** "I know, Shuli. But, try to see it from her side... Maybe she didn't even realize..."

Every day at noon, the three older women would convene with their sewing totes in hand. Knitting projects in various stages of completion were extracted from each of their bags, and they'd begin to knit in earnest, ears only for the clink-clink of knitting needles.

This Thursday was different. For one thing, Bella Steinberg didn't show up. For another, the furious clanking of Grandma Hirsh's needles and the hurt in her eyes were certainly out of character.

When she could hold it in no longer, she muttered, "Did you ever? In all my years, like this I've never seen!" Grandma Lonner would have been left in suspense indefinitely, for Grandma Hirsh's lips were clamped shut again. But the sound of an approaching bus brought out the rest of the story.

"It happened on the bus yesterday – what a bus! Children, babies, adults all over and not one empty seat for me! Bella's grandson Zevi was there. A fine boy like him, I thought, would surely give me his seat."

Grandma Lonner was inwardly relieved that Bella hadn't come today.

Grandma Hirsh continued in agitation, "But did he? No! Nein! Nyet!"

It was unusual for Grandma Hirsh to get upset, but the bus incident had made the serene woman indignant.

Her friend soothed her ruffled feelings, "Oy, it wasn't easy for you to stand the whole ride long! We all know Zevi is a real gentleman – who knows? Maybe he wasn't feeling good and needed to sit. Or maybe he was so preoccupied that he didn't even notice that you were there."

These were women of few words; their discussion ended there. But the harsh intensity of Grandma Hirsh's knitting slowly abated and that was surely a sign that she had calmed down.

INSIGHTS

How vigilant must one be with this sin, to avoid being cursed by all of Bnei Yisrael; happy is one who avoids this sin, for he receives the blessing of all of Bnei Yisrael together.

Shmiras Halashon Volume 2,
chapter 23





HALACHAH:

If one is in a group setting when someone begins to denigrate a fellow Jew, he should follow the steps on page 85.

In addition, if negative words were already said, he should try to defend the subject of the loshon hora. If he knows that this will make the speaker speak even more loshon hora, he should defend the subject after the speaker leaves.

NOTE:

This is especially good advice for someone who listened willfully and regrets listening. It gives him an opportunity to begin the teshuvah process by undoing some of the harm that resulted from his listening.

EXAMPLES:

- “You know what she was just saying about Michal? It’s not true. I was there when it happened...”
- “I’ve shopped there before, and my experience was always good...”
- “Let’s stop the loshon hora... I personally think she’s a great director...”

They were only ten men – exactly a minyan – the members of the tiny shul in the office building on North Dover. They shared a very dependent relationship – each one enabled the others to fulfill their daily obligations to daven b'tzibbur. That made for a unique bond, an unusual closeness for a group that hardly knew each other except for the daily shacharis and minchah.

Mr. Weiss and Mr. Green, reluctant to step back into their offices and their hectic schedules, lingered outside shul. Soon, Mr. Schwartz and Mr. Blau joined them. Of course. These informal gatherings were typical for the four-some.

“Hey, chevrah,” Mr. Schwartz spoke up suddenly. “Did you hear that Avraham Cohen is out of a job? Not surprising, if you ask me. I bet his employers just couldn’t handle him anymore. I mean, he’s no great brain; I always wondered how he was able to hold down a job altogether...”

“This is awful,” Mr. Weiss thought to himself. “How can he say such dreadful things about Cohen?” It was on the tip of his tongue to interject. But he caught himself in time. Mr. Schwartz never took kindly to reproof and it would only cause him to insult Avraham Cohen further. It was an odd way to react to correction, but human nature can be very odd at times.

So he held his peace while the men discussed the economic recession.

Then, Mr. Schwartz’s cell began to chime.

“Whoops, gotta go!” Mr. Schwartz said to the rest of the men. “See you!”

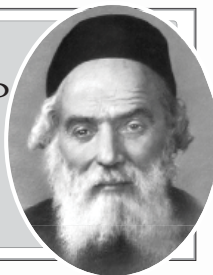
Mr. Weiss waited until his friend was down the hall and out of earshot. And here was his chance. He knew he had to say something before the other men disappeared.

“Hey, listen,” he called. Mr. Green and Mr. Blau stopped partway down the stairs, on the way to their office suites.

“Mr. Cohen might measure his words, which gives the impression that he is slow, but he is a brilliant fellow. I know him well. And I also know that his boss was happy with him. There must be some explanation to this...”

Mr. Green and Mr. Blau nodded thoughtfully over their shoulders and continued on their way. For all Mr. Weiss knew, the gossip hadn’t even penetrated. But he walked away with a spring in his step, confident that he had helped the situation as best he could.





HALACHAH:

If a person listened to loshon hora, he must go through the standard teshuvah process of regret, confession to Hashem, and resolution never to listen to loshon hora in the future. (If he accepted the loshon hora as fact, he must also convince himself that the negative information is untrue.)

EXAMPLE:

- After Hindy listened to loshon hora, she berates herself, “I can’t believe I listened to them speaking about Leah that way. I need to erase those negative thoughts from my mind. They just can’t be true. I know Leah better than that... Hashem, I’m sorry. It was so wrong of me. I won’t let myself fall into that trap again...”

Chaya took a look at the dishes piled high in the sink, the laundry waiting to be folded on the couch, and the floor in desperate need of a sweep and a mop. She’d never babysat in such a messy house before. Why couldn’t Mrs. Stern keep it all together? It was funny – she seemed wonderful when it came to dreaming up new stories to write for the community newsletter or sharing her latest philosophical thoughts. She was phenomenal at directing their school play. She just didn’t seem so good when it came to the practical stuff – like housework.

The ringing phone jarred her from her ruminations. Chaya answered on the third ring.

“Hello? Mrs. Stern?”

“No, it’s a babysitter.”

“Oh. Hmm...” On the other end of the line, Faigy Miller paused. Should she leave a message? “I’m calling from Bais Yaakov High School about props for the prod—”

“Is this...Faigy?” Chaya interrupted. “I’m Chaya Klein. Y’know, in 10B.”

“Oh, hi. You’re the babysitter? That’s cute. So you’ll write a message for Mrs. Stern?”

“I’ll write it, but no guarantees she’ll respond.” Chaya grimaced. “You’d understand if you’d see the state of this house – c-h-a-o-t-i-c!”

Faigy laughed.

“The entire counter is covered and so are the floors,” Chaya finished.

“Hang it on her front door, then. It’s important.”

It was a quick conversation, but when Faigy hung up the phone on her end, she wasn’t smiling anymore. It took her a few minutes to realize that what she’d just heard about Mrs. Stern wasn’t nice...to put it mildly.

She closed her eyes and willed Chaya’s comment to disappear. Sighing, she whispered, “I’ve been trying so hard, Hashem, to avoid loshon hora. But now I listened to negative things about my director – I didn’t even object! – and I feel bad.” Faigy stood up and reached for a Tehillim. She’d daven for a little extra help in her resolution to keep this hectic time of year free of loshon hora.





HALACHAH:

If one believed loshon hora that he heard, he must do his utmost to judge the person favorably or convince himself that the negative implication of the loshon hora was untrue. Most importantly, he must not think less of the person because of what he heard.

This applies even when he was permitted to listen to the loshon hora for a constructive purpose.

Additionally, he should do his best to convince the person who spoke the loshon hora, to overcome his dislike of the subject of the loshon hora. (In this way, he rectifies his aveirah of having caused the speaker to sin by providing him with a listening ear.)

Afterwards, he must go through the standard teshuvah process of regret, confession to Hashem, and resolution not to accept loshon hora in the future.

When the seven hundred dollar check vanished, everyone said it would turn up somewhere in the house. But the teenage Neiman boys insisted that the neighbor's boarder had a hand in it.

"She screams at all the kids; she sticks her nose into everything that's going on, and altogether, she's a witch," they'd declared with the finality of people who know what they're talking about.

Mrs. Neiman certainly didn't mean to, but every time the missing check came up in discussion, the image of the foreign woman next door came to mind.

It happened whenever she was paying the bills and an extra \$700 would have been convenient. It happened when she reached for her pocketbook to find tzeddaka pennies. The thought of money reminded Mrs. Neiman of one money-hungry neighbor.

Resentfully, she'd watch the lady coming and going, innocent as can be. Here was the boarder now, bent over against the cold, pulling her simple coat tight, shuffling to the front of the house to wheel someone's stray bike to the bikerack.

Money-hungry? Unlikely.

Mrs. Neiman frowned. What was she thinking? She had let her sons' insidious comments find a willing home in her mind.

She'd begun to see the woman as a witch and a thief. Seven hundred was big money, but believing loshon hora was big, too.

"I was thinking..." she mused the next time someone tried to mock the woman. "We really ought to invite her for a Shabbos meal. I noticed that she brought Chaim's bike to the shed so it shouldn't get stolen or rusty. She seems nice. You know, we haven't given this lady a chance."

Her boys – they were good boys really – responded to her soft rebuke.

And when she found a quiet minute, Mrs. Neiman whispered, "I feel terrible, Hashem. I let that loshon hora into my heart and mind, deep in. What a lesson I'm learning now! I'll try my best not to let this happen – never again. People's comments will not affect the way I think about others."

It took two weeks. Then, one Friday, one of the kids innocently showed her a "colorful paper" he had found in the toy room.

"C'n I keep it, Ma?"

Distractedly, she glanced at the paper, then looked again incredulously.

"The check! Where'd you find it!?" Holding the prized paper aloof, she practically danced across the room, stopped short at the window, and gazed next door. So she'd been right, after all.

