

Guarding our Speech

שומרי הלשון

SHOMREI HALOSHON



DAILY LEARNING PROGRAM

A PEDDLER OF POISON

לא תלך רכיל בעמיק (ויקרא יט:טז)

You should not go from person to person like a peddler "selling" gossip.

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*.

Peddling No-Goods



Aviva closed her notebook and glanced at Shira. "Let's take a little break, okay?"

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

"Sara called while you were upstairs," Aviva's mother said.

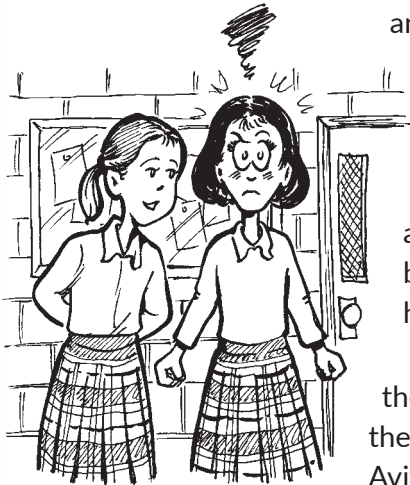
Aviva made a face. "Boy, she knows how to be annoying! Doesn't she know I'm busy today?" she asked Shira. "She can be such a pain sometimes."

The next day at recess, Shira saw Sara in the hallway. "I've got to tell you something," she whispered.

Sara was curious.

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

Sara's face got very red. "Whaaaat?!" she gasped. "That's what Aviva said about me?" She turned on her heels and stomped out to the playground.



After recess, both Aviva's and Sara's faces were stormy. Shira felt a little bad when she saw how upset they were.

"Sara has a right to know what Aviva said about her," Shira reassured herself. "At least she'll be my friend – after all, I did her a favor by telling her about Aviva's true feelings."

Summer vacation began soon afterwards, and the next time Shira saw her classmates was at their Shabbos Bnos group. To her surprise, there sat Aviva and Sara, talking happily. It was obvious that they must have made up. But when they spotted

Shira, they both turned to give her an angry look.

Shira froze, and as they turned away to continue their conversation, she realized how wrong she had been to try and break up their friendship.

think
 a little deeper

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

HEAR NO EVIL

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

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), but we may not listen to it nor 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



The fifth-grade classroom exploded with cheers as Morah Berman announced the annual trip.

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

"I can't believe it! We're gonna have a blast!" enthused Esther. "My cousin went there, and she said it was incredible."

The girls filed out of the classroom.

"Hey—wait up, Shoshi!" called Miriam, her neighbor who was in sixth grade. "What's all the excitement?"

"We're going to Adventure Fun Park for our class trip," explained Shoshi. "It's going to be amazing."

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

"Really?" Shoshi felt her enthusiasm slip away.

"It's not the greatest place on earth, that's for sure," said Miriam with authority.

Shoshi arrived home looking unhappy.

"I don't think I'm going to go on the class trip," Shoshi told her mother. "It's just a waste of money. I'd rather have a day off to myself."

Miriam's words rang in Shoshi's ears the entire next day, which she spent doing practically nothing and feeling very bored.

On Wednesday morning when Shoshi came to school, her friends crowded around her. "Shoshi! What happened? Why didn't you come? We had such a blast yesterday."

Shoshi couldn't find an answer. Not for them and not for herself.



think
 a little deeper

1. What were Shoshi's original feelings about the trip?
2. What made her change her mind?
3. **Discussion question:** Clearly, Shoshi lost out on a great opportunity by accepting Miriam's report. What could she have done differently after hearing Miriam speak negatively about Adventure Fun Park?

PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

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

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 be *mispallel* for him, and then I will treat you to a fresh fig from our orchard.”



As the boys stood together, *davening* 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

לפני עור לא תתן מכשול (ויקרא יט:יד)

Do not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person.

If 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 be over an *aveirah*.

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 do an *aveirah* 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



“What a great day for a fishing trip!” Aharon 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. Aharon began to doze off in the sunshine. He was awakened when Pinchas suddenly burst out laughing.

“Hey – what’s so funny?” Aharon asked, startled.

“I’m just remembering Nossan’s face on the last day of school when he found out that he had failed math,” said Pinchas.

“He failed?” Aharon couldn’t resist asking. “But he tried so hard.”

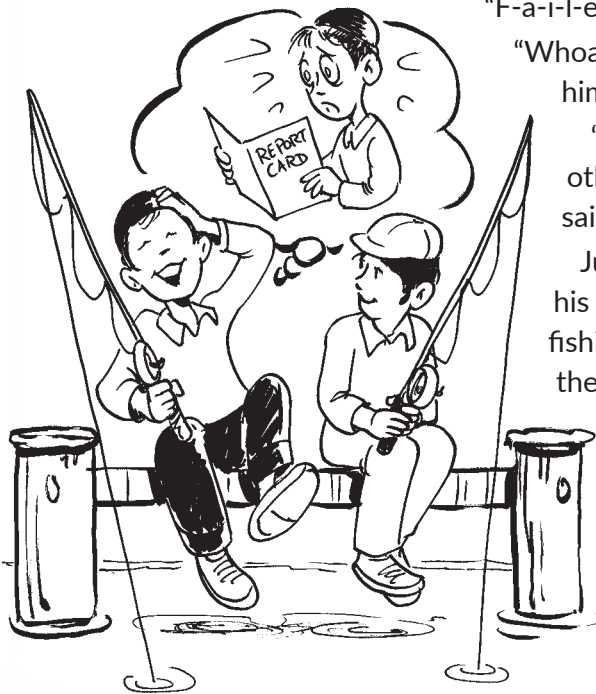
“F-a-i-l-e-d,” spelled out Pinchas firmly.

“Whoa – that’s terrible,” said Aharon. “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, Aharon felt a jerk on his rod. As he stood up to reel in the fishing line, he tripped over Pinchas’ thermos and lunchbag. Aharon landed on his knees, and his fishing rod fell into the lake. The fish – if there had been one – was now long gone.

“Hey!” Aharon 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 Aharon in the story?
2. What was the damage caused by each?
3. **Discussion question:** How many ways can a person trip up another person with *loshon hora*?

Weekly Review 1



Rule 1

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

- a. "Rusi, did you know that Dina isn't so smart?"
- b. "Rusi, Dina 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 is the punishment in the Torah for speaking *loshon hora*?

- a. Death
- b. Tzara'as
- c. Pay a fine

Rule 4

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

- a. You are causing someone to hurt himself by doing an aveirah.
- b. The heart of a person who speaks *loshon hora* is hard like a stone.



Rule 1

What is *loshon hora*? _____

Rule 2

Are we allowed to believe *loshon hora*? _____

Rule 3

What caused a person to get *tzara'as*? _____

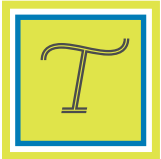
Rule 4

Fill In: Causing someone to listen to you speak *loshon hora* is like putting a stumbling block in front of a _____ man.



SHABBOS STORY WEEK ONE: RULES 1 – 4

Who Wants Life



he *Gemara* 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*, (תהילים לד:יג:יד) - “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, this seems confusing. What new idea did Reb Alexandri share with the people? He simply said over a *passuk* 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 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 in *Olam Haba*. (It is interesting to note 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.

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think
 a little deeper

1. What was Reb Alexandri offering to people?
2. How did the Chofetz Chaim explain the two-fold benefit of Reb Alexandri’s offer?