Lashon Hara - Gossip

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| [**Devarim Rabbah 6:8**](https://www.sefaria.org/Devarim_Rabbah.6.8)  Rabbi Chanina said: Plagues of leprosy come only on account of *lashon ha'ra* (speaking slander). For, as the sages said, you can see for yourself that such plagues come on account of *lashon ha'ra.* Even the righteous Miriam, who spoke *lashon ha'ra* of her brother Moses- plagues clung to her. How do we know this? As it says in Deuteronomy 25: "Remember what the Lord your God did unto Miriam." | [**דברים רבה ו׳:ח׳**](https://www.sefaria.org/Devarim_Rabbah.6.8)  (ח) ... אמר רבי חנינא: אין הנגעים באין אלא על לשון הרע. ורבנן אמרי: תדע לך שהנגעים באין על לשון הרע. הרי מרים הצדקת ע"י שדברה לשון הרע במשה אחיה, קרבו בה הנגעים. מנין? שנאמר (דברים כה): זכור את אשר עשה ה' אלהיך למרים: |

1. **Explain the difference between schmoozing and gossip. What makes either "Jewish", if at all?**

schmooze:

1) Making ingratiating small talk – talk that is business oriented, designed to both provide and solicit personal information but avoids overt pitching. Most often an artifact of “networking.” It is more art than science but can be learned.

Story: A Chasidic tale vividly illustrates the danger of improper speech: A man went about the community telling malicious lies about the rabbi. Later, he realized the wrong he had done, and began to feel remorse. He went to the rabbi and begged his forgiveness, saying he would do anything he could to make amends. The rabbi told the man, "Take a feather pillow, cut it open, and scatter the feathers to the winds." The man thought this was a strange request, but it was a simple enough task, and he did it gladly. When he returned to tell the rabbi that he had done it, the rabbi said, "Now, go and gather the feathers. Because you can no more make amends for the damage your words have done than you can recollect the feathers."

**2. Have you ever experienced a situation like this last story?  How can you understand the difference between gossip and shmoozing in your everyday life? Will what you learned today affect anything?**

**Why is this important for us as students? As leaders? As Jews?**

        We are surrounded by things that tempt us.  Unhealthy foods, video games, and gossip are just a few of the things enticing us. It's hard to make the decision to eat healthily. Or to not play "just one more round!" Or to keep from spreading a juicy piece of news. When confronted with a temptation, we know what the right decision is, but in the moment, it can be so hard to stay connected to our values, be they healthful eating, productive use of time, or not engaging in lashon hara or gossip.

        When we give in to small temptations, our consequences might not be [very grave] but they also take a toll on us. When we know that something is important to us, but continually give in to temptation, we stop valuing that thing. We lose the long-term value in place of instant gratification. Not giving in to temptations helps us to clarify our values and stick to our convictions.

(Excerpt from *Torah Topics for Today* by Judith Greenberg)

**3. Does thinking about the consequences make you stop and think about gossiping? How can you try to avoid gossiping? Can you overcome it?**

In Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 5b, the Rabbis explain that the design of our bodies also tries to minimize our speech since humans have two eyes, two ears, and two nostrils, but only one mouth. It is even said that the reason humans have earlobes is so that they can be used as earplugs when lashon hara is being spoken. Within the same text, it also includes the another way to block out gossip rather than using our earlobes: "Why are the fingers tapered like pegs? So that if one hears anything improper he can insert them in his ears."

**4. How did the Rabbis relate the design of our bodies to the concept of lashon hara? Do you believe this is correct? Explain**

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| **Chofetz Chaim 1:8**  (8) The prohibition of Lashon Hara applies as much to speaking about him verbally as it does to writing about him in a letter. There is also no difference how he communicates the Lashon Hara –whether explicitly or by way of a hint – in all cases it is categorised as Lashon Hara. | **חָפֵץ חַיִּים א׳:ח׳**  (ח) איסור זה של לשון הרע הוא בין אם הוא מספר עליו בפיו ממש או שהוא כותב עליו דבר זה במכתבו. וגם אין בו חילוק בין אם הוא מספר עליו הלשון הרע שלו בפירוש ובין אם הוא מספר עליו הלשון הרע כדרך רמז, בכל גווני בכלל לשון הרע הוא. |

**5. Do you believe there is any difference regarding written lashon hara and spoken lashon hara? Why or why not?**

**Five Categories of Lashon Hara**

1. Speech that causes disputes due to "he said, she said" talk which can cause confusion
2. Speech that is harmful or derogatory
3. Specifically untrue derogatory speech
4. Speech which causes pain - emotionally, physically, and financially
5. Words that are close to lashon hara

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| Chofetz Chaim 6:1-2  It is prohibited by the Torah to *accept and believe* lashon hara.  One who accepts it transgresses the prohibition of, "Do not accept a false report" (Exodus 23:1)... It is also forbidden to intentionally *listen*to lashon hara *even* if one has no intention of believing it.  However, there is a difference between (1) listening versus (2) believing lashon hara   1. *Listening* to lashon hara is forbidden if the information does not pertain to him.  However, if the information being said might pertain to him in the future, it is permitted to listen in order to be prepared and protect himself [from damage or harm]. It is permitted because his intent is not to hear the derogatory information about the person, but rather to protect himself from harm. 2. However, it is forbidden under all circumstances to *believe* the lashon hara and decide in your heart that the information is true [unless it is confirmed]. |  |

**6. Explain the difference between listening and believing lashon hara? When is it permitted to listen to lashon hara? Explain**

The rabbis caution us, however, to use the power of our voices and our words wisely. We must make certain that we use the divine gift of naming in a moral, appropriate, and thoughtful manner. We must also reject feeling that we are destined to live with and exemplify only the names given to us by others. Our tradition teaches that through our own choices and actions, each of us can name and rename ourselves. By doing so, each of us can bring honor to God, to the bestowers of our names, and to ourselves.