Lashon Hara - Gossip

*Source Sheet by* [*Robert Silvers*](https://www.sefaria.org/profile/robert-silvers)

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| [**Leviticus 13:1-3**](https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.13.1-3)(1) And the LORD spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying: (2) When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, or a scab, or a bright spot, and it become in the skin of his flesh the plague of tzaraat, then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests. (3) And the priest shall look upon the plague in the skin of the flesh; and if the hair in the plague be turned white, and the appearance of the plague be deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is the plague of tzaraat; and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean. | [**ויקרא י״ג:א׳-ג׳**](https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.13.1-3)(א) וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֥ה וְאֶֽל־אַהֲרֹ֖ן לֵאמֹֽר׃ (ב) אָדָ֗ם כִּֽי־יִהְיֶ֤ה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ֙ שְׂאֵ֤ת אֽוֹ־סַפַּ֙חַת֙ א֣וֹ בַהֶ֔רֶת וְהָיָ֥ה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂר֖וֹ לְנֶ֣גַע צָרָ֑עַת וְהוּבָא֙ אֶל־אַהֲרֹ֣ן הַכֹּהֵ֔ן א֛וֹ אֶל־אַחַ֥ד מִבָּנָ֖יו הַכֹּהֲנִֽים׃ (ג) וְרָאָ֣ה הַכֹּהֵ֣ן אֶת־הַנֶּ֣גַע בְּעֽוֹר־הַ֠בָּשָׂר וְשֵׂעָ֨ר בַּנֶּ֜גַע הָפַ֣ךְ ׀ לָבָ֗ן וּמַרְאֵ֤ה הַנֶּ֙גַע֙ עָמֹק֙ מֵע֣וֹר בְּשָׂר֔וֹ נֶ֥גַע צָרַ֖עַת ה֑וּא וְרָאָ֥הוּ הַכֹּהֵ֖ן וְטִמֵּ֥א אֹתֽוֹ׃ |

**Leeza Negelev:** "In *Tazria-Metzorah*, the Torah describes a skin affliction called *tzarat,* similar afflictions of clothes and home. This physical state render the person *tamei*, or in a state of spiritual impurity. Hence, there is a direct correlation to your physical body and your relationship with God and holiness because being *tamei* literally means you can’t make an offering to God."

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| [**Numbers 12:1-3**](https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.12.1-3)(1) And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman. (2) And they said: ‘Hath the LORD indeed spoken only with Moses? hath He not spoken also with us?’ And the LORD heard it.— (3) Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.— | [**במדבר י״ב:א׳-ג׳**](https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.12.1-3)(א) וַתְּדַבֵּ֨ר מִרְיָ֤ם וְאַהֲרֹן֙ בְּמֹשֶׁ֔ה עַל־אֹד֛וֹת הָאִשָּׁ֥ה הַכֻּשִׁ֖ית אֲשֶׁ֣ר לָקָ֑ח כִּֽי־אִשָּׁ֥ה כֻשִׁ֖ית לָקָֽח׃ (ב) וַיֹּאמְר֗וּ הֲרַ֤ק אַךְ־בְּמֹשֶׁה֙ דִּבֶּ֣ר ה' הֲלֹ֖א גַּם־בָּ֣נוּ דִבֵּ֑ר וַיִּשְׁמַ֖ע ה' (ג) וְהָאִ֥ישׁ מֹשֶׁ֖ה ענו [עָנָ֣יו] מְאֹ֑ד מִכֹּל֙ הָֽאָדָ֔ם אֲשֶׁ֖ר עַל־פְּנֵ֥י הָאֲדָמָֽה׃ (ס) |

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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: |

**Define 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.

2)  To get to know or suck up to someone for self benefit.

3) Being able to talk your way into any situation (or out of it), find out about any person, and know someone wherever you go.                                    -urbandictionary.com

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."

**Have you ever experienced a situation like this last story?  How can you understand the difference between gossip and shmoozing in your every day 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)

**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."

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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. |

**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 6:1-2It 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 hara1. *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].
 | חָפֵץ חַיִּים ו׳:א׳-ב׳(א) *...* אָסוּר לְקַבֵּל לָשׁוֹן הָרָע מִן הַתּוֹרָה...דְּהַיְנוּ שֶׁלֹּא נַאֲמִין בְּלִבֵּנוּ שֶׁהַסִפּוּר הוּא אֱמֶת... וְהַמְקַבֵּל עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ''לֹא תִשָּׂא שֵׁמַע שָׁוְא''.... (ב) אַף עַל שְׁמִיעַת לָשׁוֹן הָרָע לְבַד גַּם כֵּן יֵשׁ אִסוּר מִן הַתּוֹרָה, אַף דִּבְעֵת הַשְּׁמִיעָה אֵין בְּדַעְתּוֹ לְקַבֵּל אֶת הַדָּבָר, כֵּיוָן שֶׁמַּטֶּה אָזְנָיו לִשְׁמֹעַ. אַךְ יֵשׁ חִלּוּק בֵּין שְׁמִיעָה לְקַבָּלָה... דְּבִשְׁמִיעָה אֵין אִסוּר, רַק אִם אֵין הַדָּבָר נוֹגֵעַ לוֹ עַל לְהַבָּא, אֲבָל אִם הַדָּבָר נוֹגֵעַ לוֹ עַל לְהַבָּא, אִם אֱמֶת הוּא...מֻתָּר לְכַתְּחִלָּה לִשְׁמֹעַ כְּדֵי לָחוּשׁ לָזֶה וּלְהִשָּׁמֵר מִמֶּנּוּ, כֵּיוָן דְּמַה שֶּׁהוּא רוֹצֶה לִשְׁמֹעַ, אֵין כַּוָּנָתוֹ לִשְׁמֹעַ גְּנוּתוֹ שֶל חֲבֵרוֹ, רַק הוּא רוֹצֶה לְהַצִּיל אֶת עַצְמוֹ... אֲבָל לְקַבֵּל, דְּהַיְנוּ, לְהַחְלִיט הַדָּבָר בְּלִבּוֹ, שֶׁהוּא אֱמֶת, אָסוּר בְּכָל גַּוְנֵי. |

In life, you discover that people are called by three names: One is the name the person is called by his father and mother; one is the name people call him; and one is the name he acquires for himself. The best one is the one he acquires for himself. (*Tanchuma, Vayak'heil 1*)

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.

(Rabbi Andrew Davids' D'var Torah, <http://myjewishlearning.com/texts/Bible/Weekly_Torah_Portion/bereisht_uahc5762.shtml?p=3>)

Each of us has a name given by God and given by our parents. Each of us has a name given by our stature and our smile and given by what we wear./ Each of us has a name given by the mountains and given by our walls./ Each of us has a name given by the stars and given by our neighbors./ Each of us has a name given by our sins and given by our longing./ Each of us has a name given by our enemies and given by our love./ Each of us has a name given by our celebrations and given by our work./ Each of us has a name given by the seasons and given by our blindness./ Each of us has a name given by the sea and given by our death. (Zelda, "Each Man Has a Name," as adapted by Marcia Falk in *The Book of Blessings,* New York: Harper Collins, 1996, p. 106ff.)

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