



BS"D

*PROPER  
SPEECH AND  
THE EVIL  
TONGUE*

*R' Shimon Bar Yochai said: Of  
everything is the Holy One,  
Blessed be He, forgiving  
except for LASHON HA RA.*

*Zohar ha Kaddosh Parashat  
Shelach 161*

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## INTRODUCTION

### SOME BASIC DEFINITIONS

#### **LASHON HA RA: (LIT. BAD TONGUE)**

WHEN SOMEONE RELATES SOMETHING DEROGATORY ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON. EVEN IF THE DEROGATORY STATEMENT IS COMPLETELY TRUE, IT IS LASHON HA RA.

#### **MOTZI SHEM RA: (LIT. GIVING FORTH AN EVIL NAME)**

WHEN SOMEONE RELATES SOMETHING DEROGATORY AND FALSE EVEN IF ONLY PARTIALLY FALSE ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON, IT IS CALLED MOTZI SHEM RA.

#### **RECHILUT: (LIT. PEDDLING)**

REPORTING TO SOMEONE WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE OR SPOKEN AGAINST HIM. EX: I SAW JOSEPH AND HE TOLD ME BAD THINGS ABOUT YOU

#### **AVAK LASHON HA RA: (LIT. DUST OF LASHON HA RA)**

ANY STATEMENT OR REPORT THAT IS NOT IN ITSELF LASHON HA RA, BUT WILL CAUSE LASHON HA RA TO BE SPOKEN. EX: LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT ESTHER, I DON'T WANT TO TELL YOU WHAT SHE DID

**AVAK RECHILUT:**

**TELLING SOMEONE WHAT OTHERS IMPLIED ABOUT HIM THROUGH THEIR GESTURES OR EXPRESSIONS OR EVEN THROUGH AVAK LASHON HA RA. EX: DAVID WAS GOING TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOU BUT THEN HE SAID HE BETTER NOT TALK LASHON HA RA**

***WHO WANTS LIFE?***

**"It happened once that a certain peddler was making his way through the towns near the city of Tzippori, calling out as he went, "Who wishes to purchase a life giving potion?" People crowded around him [to obtain what he was offering].**

**R' Yannai was sitting on his balcony studying Torah. Upon hearing the peddler's announcement, R' Yannai called down, "Come up here and sell me your potion." The peddler replied, "Neither you nor those like you need it." However, R' Yannai persisted until the peddler agreed to come up. The peddler opened the Book of Tehillim (Psalms) and read (Psalms 34:13-14): "Who is the man that desires life?... Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn from evil and do good...". R' Yannai said, "King Shlomo too declared, 'One who guards his mouth and tongue, guards his soul from tribulations' (Proverbs 21:23) .**

**R' Yannai reflected, "All my life I read this verse, but never perceived its full meaning until this peddler came along" (Vayikra Rabbah 16:2).**

## **THE NEED TO CALL PEOPLE'S ATTENTION REGARDING THIS SIN**

The Maharzu comments: R' Yannai had never understood why David taught this lesson in the form of a question and answer. After meeting the peddler, R' Yannai understood that because people so easily transgress the laws of proper speech, it is therefore necessary to draw their attention to this matter by making a public announcement such as the peddler did.

## **LIFE IN THIS WORLD AND LIFE IN THE WORLD TO COME**

R. Abba expounded in this connection the verse: "Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit." (Psalms 34:13-14)

'Life here', he said, 'is the life which is called "the World to Come", where true life abides. Similarly the "tree of life" means the tree that springs from that life and is planted therein. By "days" here is signified the name of the Holy King which is attached to the supernal days called "the days of the heaven over the earth". He who desires to have a portion in the higher life and to cleave to the supernal days should above all keep guard over his mouth and his tongue. He should preserve his mouth from food and drink which defile the soul and remove man from those supernal days and life, and he should keep his tongue from words of evil so as not to be defiled by them. Further, "mouth" and "tongue" are names given to supernal places, and therefore a man should be careful not to bring a stain on his mouth and tongue.'

The Holy Zohar Shemini 41a

## **EXCERPTS FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO THE SEFER CHAFETZ CHAYIM**

**LASHON HA RA WAS THE MAIN CAUSE OF  
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE**  
...At the end of the of the Second Temple period, causeless hatred and LASHON HA RA became prevalent among us, due to our many sins, for this reason the Temple was destroyed and we were exiled from our land, as is stated in Yoma (9b) and in the Jerusalem Talmud (Yoma 1:1).

(Although the Gemara there mentions only baseless hatred, the intent is also to the LASHON HA RA which results from such hatred, otherwise the punishment would not have been so harsh. This is why the Gemara there concludes: "This is to teach you that causeless hatred is as destructive as idolatry, adultery, and murder and this statement also appears in Tractate Arachin (15b) in regards to LASHON HA RA...

### **OUR PRAYERS ARE NOT ANSWERED BECAUSE OF OUR SINS**

...Ever since that time [of the Destruction] we have been waiting and praying to the Holy One, Blessed is He, that He should draw us close [to Him by redeeming us from exile] as He promised us many times in His holy Torah and through His prophets. But our prayer is not accepted before Him, as the Sages said in Tractate Berachos (32b): "From the day the Temple was destroyed, an iron wall separates Israel from their Father in heaven."

**THE EXILE IS OUR FAULT  
AND NOT HASHEM'S**

In truth it is not against Him that we have to complain (heaven forbid), but only against ourselves; for from His side nothing (heaven forbid) prevents Him [from redeeming us], as it is written in Yeshayahu (59:1-2): "Behold, Hashem's hand is not too short to save, nor His ear too heavy to hear. Rather, your sins [have been separating you from your G-d, and your transgressions have hidden His face from you, and He will not hear]." ...

**LASHON HA RA IS THE MAIN  
CAUSE OF OUR EXILE**

...Now, when we search our ways and examine which sins are the main ones that have prolonged our exile, we shall find many. But the sin of LASHON HA RA is first and foremost, for a number of reasons: For one, because this was the main cause of our exile, as we mentioned above in the name of Tractate Yoma and the Jerusalem Talmud. If so, as long as we do not see to it that this sin is remedied, how can the redemption come? Since this sin was so damaging that [because of it] we were exiled from our land, then all the more so it can prevent us from returning to our land.

**THE EXILE WAS DECREED AT THE TIME OF  
THE SIN OF THE SPIES IN THE DESERT**

Moreover, it is known that the exile was already decreed upon us from when the Spies committed their sin, as it is written in Tehillim (106:26-27): "He raised His hand to them [in an oath], to cast them down ...among the nations and to scatter them

among the lands" as this matter is explained by Rashi to this verse and Ramban to Chumash BaMidbar [14:1], Parashas Shelach. Now, the sin of the Spies was the transgression of LASHON HA RA, as is stated in Arachin [15a]. If so, we must remedy this sin before the redemption...

### **THE SHECHINA WAS REMOVED FROM OUR MIDST BECAUSE OF LASHON HA RA**

...In addition, it is stated explicitly in Midrash Rabbah, Parashat Ki Teitze [6:14]: "Said the Holy One, Blessed is He: 'In this world, because there was LASHON HA RA among you, I removed My Presence from among you ...But in the time to come [I shall take away the evil inclination from among you ...and I shall return My Presence to be among you...

### **HASHEM WILL REVEAL HIMSELF WHEN THE JEWS ARE UNITED**

Moreover, we have an explicit verse in Parashas Berachah (Devarim 33:5): "He will be King in Yeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel are gathered together." Rashi explains there, citing Sifri: "When is He the King of Yeshurun [the Jewish People]? Only when 'the tribes of Israel are gathered together' in unity,' but not when they are divided into [quarreling] groups." And it is known that this matter [of divisiveness] usually comes about through LASHON HA RA.

### **CURSED BE THE ONE WHO HITS HIS FELLOW IN SECRET**

Besides this, how can we receive the blessings of the Holy One, Blessed is He, for which we hope, when due to our many sins



we are habituated to this transgression? For after all, the Torah has put an explicit curse upon it: "Cursed is he who hits his fellow in secret" [Devarim 27:24], which refers to LASHON HA RA, as Rashi explains there. This is in addition to the other curses there which apply to LASHON HA RA, as explained below at the end of the Introduction.

### **THE PUNISHMENT FOR LASHON HA RA IS UNIMAGINABLE**

Besides this, we know from the Gemara mentioned above (Arachin 15b) that the gravity of this sin is immeasurable, so much so that the Sages say [about the sinner] that he is like one who (G-d forbid) denies the existence of G-d. And the Jerusalem Talmud (Peah 1:1) says that for this transgression a person is punished in this world, while his main punishment is reserved for the world to come.

### **LASHON HA RA AROUSES THE SATAN AND HE THEN HAS THE POWER TO ACCUSE THE JEWS**

It seems obvious that the reason why the Torah is so strict about this sin is that it greatly arouses the great Accuser against the Jewish People, and through this he kills many people in many countries.

*The holy Zohar Parashat Pekudei (p. 264b) states:*

There is a certain spiritual being who is in charge of those who are habituated to speak LASHON HA RA, and when people arouse themselves to speak LASHON HA RA, or when an individual arouses himself to speak LASHON HA RA, then that evil, defiled spiritual being, who is called Sichsucha

(Strife) is aroused in the upper realm, and he rests upon that arousal of LASHON HA RA which people initiated, and he comes up above and causes, through that arousal of LASHON HA RA, death, war and killing in the world. Woe unto those who arouse this evil aspect, who do not guard their mouth and their tongue and do not pay heed to this, and do not know that the arousal in the upper realms depends upon what is aroused here below whether for good or evil ...and all [of the negative forces awakened by the transgression of LASHON HA RA] bring accusation in order to awaken that great serpent so that it will bring accusation upon the arousal of LASHON HA RA which takes place here below.

#### **THE SPEAKERS OF LASHON HA RA CAUSE TREMENDOUS DESTRUCTION**

We can say that this is the intent of the Gemara in Arachin (15b): "Whoever speaks LASHON HA RA magnifies his sins up to the heavens, as it is said: 'They set their mouth against heaven, and their tongue struts upon the earth' (Tehillim 73:9)." The meaning is: Even though their tongue struts upon the earth, nevertheless their mouth is set against heaven. Likewise Tanna DeVe Eliyahu states that the LASHON HA RA which a person speaks rises up opposite to the Throne of Glory. From this we can realize the tremendous destruction inflicted upon the Jewish People by habitual speakers of LASHON HA RA.

#### **AFTER SPEAKING LASHON HA RA THE PRAYERS CAN NOT GO UPWARD TO HEAVEN**

There is yet another reason for the severity of the damage caused by this sin; for by making a defect in one's speech

through forbidden utterances, he impedes all his subsequent holy utterances from rising upwards.

*These are the words of the holy Zohar in Parashas Pekudei:*

“Based upon this evil spiritual being there are a number of other accusers whose task is to seize any bad word or foul word that a person brings forth from his mouth, and [when] he later brings forth holy words woe unto them, woe unto their lives. Woe unto them in this world, woe unto them in the world to come, because these defiled spiritual beings take that defiled word, and when the person later brings forth holy words, those defiled spiritual beings bring that defiled word first, and defile the holy word so that it brings no merit to him, and the strength of the holiness is, as it were, weakened”.

Thus we see directly from the holy Zohar that all our words of Torah and prayers remain suspended in the air [due to the sin of LASHON HA RA] and do not rise upwards. If so, from where will our help come to bring us such things as the coming of Mashiach?

### **A SIN THAT PEOPLE REPEAT THOUSANDS OF TIMES IN THEIR LIFETIME**

When we look deeply into this matter we shall find even more. For besides the fact that it is in itself a grave sin, as explained above, it also causes great destruction in all the worlds, darkening and reducing their light, due to the fact that many people repeatedly violate this negative precept hundreds and thousands of times during their lifetime; for even a small sin, when repeated many times, eventually becomes "like wagon-ropes," as Isaiah cries out (Yeshayahu 5:18): "Alas, those who

draw out iniquity with ropes of vanity, and sin [becomes] like wagon-ropes!" The analogy is to silk threads which, when doubled and redoubled hundreds of times, form thick ropes. All the more so does the analogy apply to this sin [LASHON HA RA] which is extremely grave in itself, and many, many people are in the habit of committing it many thousands of times during their lifetime, and they do not accept upon themselves at all to be careful about it certainly the destruction caused to the upper worlds is immeasurable.

**THE REASONS FOR THE SIN OF LASHON HA  
RA: THE EVIL INCLINATION  
MISLEADS PEOPLE**

I have given thought to the question: Why has this negative precept become, in the eyes of many people, so freely open to violation? I realized that this is for a number of reasons with the masses from one side, and with the learned from another side. The masses do not know at all that the prohibition against LASHON HA RA applies even to true information. Among the Torah scholars, on the other hand even among those for whom it is clarified and verified that the prohibition applies to true information many are misled by the evil inclination in other ways. For one, the evil inclination immediately persuades [the scholar] that the person about whom he wishes to speak is a hypocrite.' The evil inclination tells him: 'It is a mitzvah to expose hypocrites and wicked people.' Or sometimes [the evil inclination] tells [the scholar]: "After all, so-and-so is a quarreler, and [therefore] it is permitted' to speak LASHON HA RA about him.' Or sometimes [the evil inclination] entices [the scholar] with the permission known as "in front of three

people;" or sometimes with the permission known as "in front of the subject," [meaning] that while relating [the LASHON HA RA] he thinks: 'I would even say this to his face.' And the evil inclination shows him the relevant Talmud passages. Or sometimes [the evil inclination] entices [the scholar] regarding the nature of the information, persuading him that it is not in the category of LASHON HA RA; for example many people are accustomed, due to our many sins, to publicize that someone is not learned...

#### **THE YETZER HA RA WORKS HARD AND IN MANY WAYS TO MAKE JEWS STUMBLE**

...In summary, the evil inclination acts in one of two ways: Either it entices a person to believe that the information he wants to reveal is not in the category of LASHON HA RA; or that the person he wants to speak about is not the type about whom the Torah forbids us to speak LASHON HA RA.

#### **THE EVIL INCLINATION USES THE SAME TECHNIQUE AS THE SERPENT**

If the evil inclination sees that it cannot conquer a person with these stratagems, it deceives him in the opposite manner. It presents to him such a strict view of the topic of LASHON HA RA as to show him that everything is in the category of LASHON HA RA; and if so, it is impossible to live upon this earth in this manner, unless he separates himself completely from the matters of this world. This is similar to the slander of the guileful serpent, who said [to Chavah] (Bereshit 3:1): "Perhaps G-d said: 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"

**MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THAT IT IS  
FORBIDDEN TO BELIEVE LASHON HA RA**

Besides this, many people lack knowledge about the prohibition of believing LASHON HA RA. [They do not realize] that even just believing it in one's heart is forbidden, and the only thing that is permitted is to take any necessary precautions. There are many other similar matters regarding the believing of LASHON HA RA and RECHILUT which cannot be explained here. Moreover, people do not know how to make amends if they have transgressed by speaking or believing LASHON HA RA OR RECHILUT.

**DUE TO OUR MANY SINS, MANY DON'T  
CONSIDER LASHON HA RA A SIN  
AT ALL, G-D SAVE US**

For these reasons the matter collapses altogether, since inevitably a person falls into the habit of speaking whatever happens to come out of his mouth without thinking first whether his words might be RECHILUT OR LASHON HA RA. We have become so accustomed to this sin, due to our many iniquities, that because of this many people do not consider it a sin at all, even if someone says something which everyone can clearly see is complete LASHON HA RA and Rechilus for example, if one person speaks evil about another, deprecating him with the utmost derision. If anyone asks him: 'Why did you speak LASHON HA RA OR RECHILUT?' he will think inwardly: 'He is trying to make me into a saint or a pious one,' and will not accept the reprimand at all, since, due to our many sins, he considers this matter as if it were free for everyone to do as he pleases...

**IS IT BETTER FOR PEOPLE TO REMAIN  
IGNORANT REGARDING THE  
SIN OF LASHON HA RA?**

...I know full well that there will be people who will want to belittle the value of studying this matter. They will base themselves upon the saying of the Sages (Shabbat 148b): "It is preferable that they should [sin] in ignorance and not [sin] knowingly." But the truth is that I am right for two reasons: (1) The rule, "It is preferable that they should [sin in ignorance]" does not apply to commandments which are stated explicitly in the Torah, as [Shulchan Aruch] rules in Orach Chaim [608:2 in the Hagoh] and [the prohibition against] LASHON HA RA and RECHILUT are stated explicitly in the Torah. Moreover, if it were true, then we should not teach the laws of theft in public, since they too are very difficult to observe, as our Holy Sages noted in Bava Basra [165a]...

**SHABBAT LAWS ARE ALSO DIFFICULT TO  
OBSERVE YET WE TEACH THEM  
TO EVERY JEW**

Likewise [if it were true that we should not inform people of prohibitions that are difficult to observe] we should not teach people the laws of the Shabbat, which are "like mountains hanging from a hair," and which include many laws which are very difficult to observe!...

**WE ARE COMMANDED TO RECALL THE SIN  
OF MIRIAM DAILY TO LET EVERYONE KNOW  
ABOUT THE SIN OF LASHON HA RA**

...Moreover, we can prove from Scripture itself [that the laws of LASHON HA RA should be taught to the public], for it is

written in the Torah (Devarim 24:9): "Remember what Hashem your G-d did to Miriam," and Ramban says in the name of Sifri that this means one must regularly make verbal mention of the story of Miriam [who was punished with leprosy for speaking disparagingly about Moshe Rabbenu], so that through this [remembrance of Miriam] we should contemplate the gravity of this bitter sin...

### **THE GREAT BENEFITS DERIVED FROM THE STUDY OF THE LAWS OF LASHON HA RA**

Learning the laws of LASHON HA RA will at least keep a person from falling into the category of BAAL LASHON HA RA (Habitual sinners of LASHON HA RA). There is another great benefit to be gained from the study of these matters that as a result of this [study] it will not appear to him as an area where everyone is free to do as he pleases. Then even if, heaven forbid, he occasionally stumbles in this offense, he will not be in the category of Maki LASHON HA RA. The Sages say in Arachin [15b] that being a BAAL LASHON HA RA is equivalent to the three most severe sins [idolatry, adultery and murder], and that [the transgressor] will never greet the Divine Presence, and similarly severe punishments...

...In addition, through this, he will know in his soul that he has sinned before Hashem as it is said (Yirmiyahu 2:35): "'Behold, I shall enter into judgment against you because you said: 'I did not sin.' " [Moreover, if he knows he has transgressed] he will take measures to appease his fellow for this, or at least will make an effort not to speak about him again. However this will not be the case if, heaven forbid, he ignores this subject and does not consider it a sin at all.'



**STUDYING THE TORAH REDUCES THE  
STRENGTH OF THE EVIL INCLINATION**

In addition, besides these [benefits], we know what Midrash Rabbah says in Parashas Nasso [14:4]: "If you toil diligently hard over the words [of the Sages], the Holy One, Blessed is He, removes the evil inclination from you."

Therefore I said in my heart: 'Perhaps if people study this work, in which are gathered all the words of the Rishonim on this subject, and if they contemplate it, the evil inclination will not have so much power over this sin.' When one withdraws oneself a little from this sin, it follows as a matter of course that as time goes on he will remove his hand from it altogether; for habit plays a large role in this sin, and "when one sets out to become pure [of sin], he is helped [by heaven]" (Yoma 38b). Through this merit, "A Redeemer will come to Zion" speedily, in our days, Amen.

A tradition from the Baal Shem Tov ZTK"l: Whoever judges another, favorably or critically, is actually rendering judgment over himself. For example, if someone remarks that so-and-so's good deed or good words deserve G-d's blessings for his needs, or that so-and-so's misdeed or improper speech have earned him punishment, these very remarks are transposed into a verdict about himself, whether favorable or otherwise.

Sefer HaTamim 7, p. 104

# CHAPTER 1

## ***THE 31 MITZVOT [17 NEGATIVE AND 14 POSITIVE] AND THE 4 COURSES THAT ARE TRANSGRESSED WHEN TALKING LASHON HA RA***

**ADAPTED FROM THE SEFER CHAFETZ CHAYIM**

**SOME OF THEM ARE ALWAYS TRANSGRESSED AND OTHERS ARE TRANSGRESSED ON PARTICULAR CASES DEPENDING WHO WE TALK ABOUT OR HOW WE SAY IT**

### **NEGATIVE COMMANDMENTS**

- 1- (VAYIKRA 19:16) “You shall not go as a slanderer among your people; nor shall you stand against the blood of your neighbor; I am the Lord.”**
- 2- (SHEMOT 23:1) “You shall not raise a false report”.**
- 3- (DEVARIM 24:8) “Take heed concerning the plague of leprosy”** Leprosy came as a punishment for LASHON HA RA.
- 4- (VAYIKRA 19:14) “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your G-d; I am the Lord.”** This is when you cause another one to sin as when you tell someone LASHON HA RA.

- 5- (DEVARIM 8:11) **“Beware that you forget not the Lord your G-d, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day”** This prohibition is against being arrogant and the one who slanders many times does it out of arrogance.
- 6- (VAYIKRA 22:32) **“Neither shall you profane my holy name; but I will be sanctified among the people of Israel; I am the Lord who sanctifies you”**  
When someone sins without deriving any physical pleasure [Like the sin of LASHON HA RA] this is considered rebelling against Hashem and profaning His name.
- 7- (VAYIKRA 19:17) **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart”**. Usually the one who talks LASHON HA RA hates his fellow Jew.
- 8- (VAYIKRA 19:8) **“You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people”**  
Many times the LASHON HA RA one says is the product of our feelings of vengeance.
- 9- (VAYIKRA 19:8) **“You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people”**  
This verse is transgressed when you recall something bad a person might have done to you.
- 10- (DEVARIM 19:15) **“One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sins”**. When someone says LASHON HA RA about someone else he is many times considered a single witness.

- 11- (SHEMOT 23:2) “You shall not follow a multitude to do evil”.** This is when you join a group who speaks LASHON HA RA.
- 12- (BAMIDBAR 17:5) “So that he be not as Korach, and as his company”.** This verse forbids us to maintain disputes like that of Korach and his followers.
- 13- (VAYIKRA 25:17) “You shall not therefore wrong one another; but you shall fear your G-d; for I am the Lord your G-d”.** This is a prohibition against offending or insulting anyone.
- 14- (VAYIKRA 19:17) “You shall rebuke your neighbor, and do not sin on his account”.** This verse forbids to embarrass others even when talking privately.
- 15- (SHEMOT 22:21) “You shall not afflict any widow, or orphaned child”.** If you talk LASHON HA RA in their presence this prohibition is violated.
- 16- (BAMIDBAR 35:33) “So you shall not pollute the land in which you are, for blood pollutes the land; and the land can not be cleansed of the blood that is shed there, but by the blood of him who shed it”.** This verse prohibits one to flatter a wrongdoer.
- 17- (VAYIKRA 19:14) “You shall not curse the deaf...but shall fear your G-d; I am the Lord.** When you talk about someone in anger you are bound to curse him

## POSITIVE COMMANDMENTS

- 18- (DEVARIM 24:9) “Remember what the Lord your G-d did to Miriam by the way, after you came out of Egypt”.** We are commanded to remember that Hashem punished Miriam for speaking LASHON HA RA against Moshe.
- 19- (VAYIKRA 19:18) “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord”.** When you love someone you don’t talk evil about anyone.
- 20- (VAYIKRA 19:15) “You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment...but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor”.** This verse exhorts us to give the benefit of the doubt when judging our fellow.
- 21- (VAYIKRA 25:35) “And if your brother has become poor, and his means fail with you; then you shall relieve him; though he may be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with you”.** If you relate LASHON HA RA and as a consequence someone is hurt financially you transgress this Mitzvah.

- 22- (VAYIKRA 19:17) “You shall rebuke your neighbor”.** When you listen to LASHON HA RA instead of rebuking the talker you violate this commandment.
- 23- (DEVARIM 10:20) “To Him shall you cleave”** If you cleave to gossipers instead of Talmide Chachamim you violate this commandment.
- 24- (VAYIKRA 19:30) “You shall fear my sacred place”** Anyone who speaks or listens to LASHON HA RA in a synagogue or Bet Medrash violates this commandment.
- 25- (VAYIKRA 19:32) “You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear your G-d; I am the Lord”.** We must honor a Talmid Chacham even if he is young. When you relate LASHON HA RA about him you violate this commandment.
- 26- (VAYIKRA 21:8) “You shall sanctify him therefore; for he offers the bread of your G-d; he shall be holy to you; for I the Lord, which sanctify you, am holy”.** This verse obligates us to show respect for Kohanim. If we talk LASHON HA RA about them we transgress this commandment.

- 27- (SHEMOT 20:12) “Honor you father and your mother”.** If one talks LASHON HA RA against his parents or an elder brother, he violates this Mitzvah.
- 28- (DEVARIM 10:20) “The Lord Your G-d shall you fear”.** Hashem is aware of everything we do or say so when we say LASHON HA RA we violate this Mitzvah.
- 29- (DEVARIM 6:7) “And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up”.** When you talk LASHON HA you are guilty of not studying Torah during that time.
- 30- (SHEMOT 23:7) “Keep far from a false matter; and do not slay the innocent and righteous; for I will not justify the wicked”.** When you talk LASHON HA RA and some details are not true you violate this commandment.
- 31- (DEVARIM 28:9) “The Lord shall establish you as a holy people to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your G-d, and walk in His ways.”** This verse exhorts us to imitate the behavior of Hashem and when we talk LASHON HA RA we are violating it.

## **THE FOUR CURSES FOR THE PERSON WHO SPEAKS LASHON HA RA**

Besides the negative and positive commandments already enumerated there are 4 curses that the person can receive upon himself when he engages in LASHON HA RA.

**32- (DEVARIM 27:24) “Cursed be the one who hits his friend in secret”** Anyone who talks LASHON HA RA does just this, he hits his friend behind his back, in secret.

**33-(DEVARIM 27:18) “Cursed be the one who confounds the blind on the road”** By making others [The listeners] transgress you confound them with sin.

**34-(DEVARIM 27:26) “Cursed be the one who will not establish the words of this Torah in order to do them”** If he was in the habit of repeating the transgression of LASHON HA RA constantly.

**35-(DEVARIM 27:16) “Cursed be the one who hits his father or his mother”** If G-d forbid the person spoke LASHON HA RA on his father or mother.

*“The slanderer repeats his indiscretion. Ten times a day he will humiliate, and debase, and shame, and speak overmuch and smite in secret. And would that there were an end to his punishment-for the slanderer puts no end to his words -even a light transgression becoming very weighty upon the indiscretion's being repeated many times”*

*Rabbenu Yonah Shaare Teshuvah 203*



## CHAPTER 2

### THE RAMBAM RABBI MOSHE BEN MAIMON ZTK'L

#### LAWS DEALING WITH RECHILUT AND LASHON HA RA HILCHOT DEOT CHAPTER 7

##### RECHILUT: A SEVERE SIN THAT CAN CAUSES THE DEATH OF MANY JEWS

1. A person who collects gossip about a friend violates a prohibition as [Leviticus 19:16] states: "Do not go around gossiping [RACHIL] among your people." Even though this transgression is not punished by lashes, it is a severe sin and can cause the death of many Jews. Therefore, [the warning]: "Do not stand still over your neighbor's blood" is placed next to it in the Torah (ibid.)...

##### A GOSSIPER BRINGS ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD

2. Who is a gossip? One who collects information and [then] goes from person to person, saying: "This is what so and so said;" "This is what I heard about so and so." Even if the statements are true, they bring about the destruction of the world.

**A WORSE SIN THAN GOSSIPING,  
THAT OF LASHON HA RA**

There is a much more serious sin than [gossip], which is also included in this prohibition: LASHON HA RA, i.e., relating deprecating facts about a colleague, even if they are true.

[LASHON HA RA does not refer to the invention of lies;] that is referred to as defamation of character [MOTZI SHEM RA]. Rather, one who speaks LASHON HA RA is someone who sits and relates: "This is what so and so has done;" "His parents were such and such;" "This is what I have heard about him," telling uncomplimentary things. Concerning this [transgression], the verse (Psalms 12:4) states: "May G-d cut off all guileful lips, the tongues which speak proud things..."

**THE SPEAKER OF LASHON HA RA HAS NO  
PORTION IN THE WORLD TO COME AND THIS  
SIN IS EQUIVALENT TO IDOL WORSHIP,  
FORBIDDEN SEXUAL RELATIONS  
AND MURDER**

3. Our Sages said (Arachin 15b): "There are three sins for which retribution is exacted from a person in this world and, [for which] he is [nonetheless,] denied a portion in the world to come: idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and murder and LASHON HA RA is equivalent to all of them." Our Sages also said: "Anyone who speaks LASHON HA RA is like one who denies G-d as [Written in Psalms 12:5]: "Those who said: With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own, Who is Lord over us"?"

**LASHON HA RA KILLS 3 PEOPLE: THE  
SPEAKER, THE LISTENER AND THE SUBJECT  
ABOUT WHOM ONE HAS SPOKEN**

In addition, they said: " LASHON HA RA kills three [people], the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is spoken. The one who listens to it [suffers] more than the one who speaks it.

**THE DUST OF LASHON HA RA  
[AVAK LASHON HA RA]**

4. There are certain matters which are considered "the dust of LASHON HA RA." [AVAK LASHON HA RA] What is implied? [For example, a person says:] "Who will tell so and so to continue acting as he does now," or "Do not talk about so and so; I do not want to say what happened," or the like.

**PRAISING SOMEONE IN FRONT OF OTHERS IS  
ALSO AVAK LASHON HA RA**

Similarly, it is also considered the "dust of LASHON HA RA" when someone speaks favorably about a colleague in the presence of his enemies, for this will surely prompt them to speak disparagingly about him. In this regard, King Salomon said (Proverbs 27:14): "One who greets his colleague early in the morning, in a loud voice, curses him," for his positive [act] will bring him negative [repercussions].

**WHEN LASHON HA RA IS  
DISGUISED AS A JOKE**

Similarly, [it is forbidden] a person who relates LASHON HA RA in frivolity and jest, as if he were not speaking with hatred.

This was also mentioned by Salomon in his wisdom (Proverbs 26:18,19): "As a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death and says: ` I am only joking."

[Also, to be condemned is] someone who speaks LASHON HA RA about a colleague slyly, pretending to be innocently telling a story without knowing that it is harmful. When he is reproved, he excuses himself by saying: "I did not know that the story was harmful or that so and so was involved."

**LASHON HA RA IS FORBIDDEN WHETHER THE  
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT  
IS PRESENT OR NOT**

5. [There is no difference] whether one speaks LASHON HA RA about a person in his presence or behind his back.

**ANYTHING THAT WE RELATE TO OTHERS  
THAT CAN CAUSE DAMAGE TO SOMEONE IS  
CONSIDERED LASHON HA RA**

[The statements] of people who relate matters which, when passed from one person to another, will cause harm to a man's person or to his property or will even [merely] annoy him or frighten him are considered as LASHON HA RA...

**FORBIDDEN TO ASSOCIATE WITH THOSE  
WHO HABITUALLY SIN THROUGH  
LASHON HA RA**

6. All the above are people who speak LASHON HA RA in whose neighborhood, one is forbidden to dwell. How much more so [is it forbidden] to sit [together] with them and hear

their conversation. The judgment against our ancestors in the desert was only sealed because of LASHON HA RA.

## HILCHOT DEOT CHAPTER 2

### ONE SHOULD ALWAYS CULTIVATE SILENCE

4. One should always cultivate silence and refrain from speaking, except with regard to matters of knowledge or things that are necessary for his physical welfare. It was said that Rav, the disciple of our saintly teacher, [Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi,] never uttered an idle word in all his days - which is what the conversation of most people consists of.

### WHOEVER SPEAKS AT LENGTH BRINGS ON SIN

One should not speak at length even about [matters involving one's] physical needs. On this point, our Sages commanded us and said (Avot 1:16): "Whoever speaks at length brings on sin." They also said (Avot 1:17): "I have found nothing better for one's person than silence." Similarly, when speaking about matters of Torah or knowledge, one's words should be brief, but rich in content. This is what the Sages commanded with their statement: "One should always teach his students with brevity." In contrast, if one's words are many and the content scant, this is foolishness, of which [Kohelet 5:2] states: "The dream comes with a multitude of subjects, and the voice of the fool with a multitude of words."

### SILENCE IS A SAFEGUARD FOR WISDOM

5. Silence is a safeguard for wisdom (Avot 3:16). Therefore, one should not hasten to answer, nor speak at length. He

should teach his students in calm and tranquility without shouting or wordiness. This is what Salomon stated: "The words of the wise are heard in tranquility" (Kohelet 9:17).

### **IT IS FORBIDDEN TO BE A FLATTERER OR A HYPOCRITE**

6. A person is forbidden to act in a smooth-tongued and luring manner. He should not speak one thing outwardly and think otherwise in his heart. Rather, his inner self should be like the self which he shows to the world. What he feels in his heart should be the same as the words on his lips.

### **IT IS FORBIDDEN TO DECEIVE PEOPLE**

It is forbidden to deceive people, even a non-Jew. For example, one should not sell a gentile the meat of an animal which has not been ritually slaughtered as if it were ritually slaughtered meat, nor a shoe made from the hide of an animal which has died of natural causes as if it were made of the hide of a slaughtered animal. One should not press his colleague to share a meal with him when he knows that his friend will not accept the invitation, nor should he press presents upon him when he knows that his friend will not accept them. He should not open casks [supposedly] for his friend which he must open for sale, in order to deceive him into thinking that they have been opened in his honor. The same applies with all matters of this sort.

### **IT IS FORBIDDEN TO UTTER A SINGLE WORD OF DECEPTION OR FRAUD**

It is forbidden to utter a single word of deception or fraud. Rather, [one should have] only truthful speech, a proper spirit and a heart pure from all deceit and trickery.

**ENVY DESIRE AND HONOR DRIVE A  
MAN OUT OF THIS WORLD**

7. One should neither be constantly laughing and a jester, nor sad and depressed, but happy. Our Sages declared (Avot 3:16): "Jesting and lightheadedness accustom one to lewdness." They also directed that a man should not laugh without control, nor be sad and mournful, but receive everyone in a friendly manner.

Similarly, he should not be greedy, rushing for wealth and possessions, nor lazy and an idler from work. Rather, he should be of a goodly eye and limit his business endeavors [so that he may] occupy himself with Torah study. He should be happy with the little which is his lot. He should not be quarrelsome, of envious temperament, full of desires, nor pursue honor. Our Sages have said (Avot 4:27): "Envy, desire and honor remove a man from life in this world. "The general principle is that one should follow the midpoint quality of each temperament until all his traits are aligned at the midpoint. This is what [is implied by] Salomon's statement: "Make even the turning of your foot and make all your ways firm" (Proverbs 4:26).

**HILCHOT TESHUVAH 3:6**

**THOSE WHO CONSTANTLY TALK LASHON HA  
RA HAVE NO PORTION IN THE WORLD TO  
COME BUT ARE PUNISHED AND  
DESTROYED FOR EVER**

And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come, but are cut off and destroyed and punished for all

eternity for the magnitude of their wickedness and sin: The apostates and the non believers, those who deny the Torah, those who deny the resurrection of the dead, and the coming of the Mashiach...murderers, those who constantly talk LASHON HA RA, and those who repudiate their circumcision”

*Our Sages said (Arachin 15b):*

*"There are three sins for which retribution is exacted from a person in this world and, [for which] he is [nonetheless,] denied a portion in the world to come: idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and murder and LASHON HA RA is equivalent to all of them." Our Sages also said: "Anyone who speaks LASHON HA RA is like one who denies G-d as [Written in Psalms 12:5]: "Those who said: With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own, Who is Lord over us"?*



## CHAPTER 3

### SELECTIONS FROM THE SEFER CHAFETZ CHAYIM

BY RABBI ISRAEL MEIR KAGAN ZTK'L MAY HI  
MERIT PROTECT US

#### KLAL ALEF – FIRST CHAPTER

#### IT IS FORBIDDEN TO RECOUNT WRONGFUL ASPECTS OF ONE'S FRIEND IF THEY ARE COMPLETELY TRUE

1- It is forbidden to recount wrongful aspects about one's friend, even if it is completely true, and this is called in the writings of our Sages LASHON HA RA (For if someone within his story admixes lies in order to further damage his friend this falls under the category of MOTZI SHEM RA and the person's sin is then much greater than LASHON HA RA) And the one who speaks LASHON HA RA transgresses the negative commandment (VAYIKRA 19:16) "Do not go as a talebearer among your people". And LASHON HA RA is included in the prohibition of RECHILUT (Tale bearing)

#### THERE ARE A TOTAL OF 31 COMMANDMENTS THAT CAN BE TRANSGRESSED THROUGH LASHON HA RA AND RECHILUT

2- This negative commandment that we have written is the one by which the Torah explicitly prohibits LASHON HA RA and

**RECHILUT** but there are many others commandments (31) both positive and negative included in this prohibition that a person transgresses when he relates evil reports.

**THOSE WHO ALWAYS TALK LASHON HA RA  
ARE IN THE CATEGORY OF BAALE LASHON  
HA RA AND THEIR PUNISHMENT  
IS MUCH GREATER**

3- All of the above applies even if one only occasionally happens to recount wrongful things about his friend but if G-d forbid, he is in the habit of constantly sinning in this fashion, like those who are accustomed to always sit and relate: “This is what so and so did” or “This is what so and so parents did” or “This is what I heard about him” and he talks about wrongful disparaging things, people that act thus are called by our Sages Z’L habitual slanderers [BAALE LASHON HA RA] and their punishment is much greater since they brazenly and maliciously transgress Hashem’s Torah and they act as if there was no Master in the world and about these people it is written: “May Hashem cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks grandly (Tehillim 12:4)

**WHOEVER INCURS IN LASHON HA RA HAS  
NO SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME**

4- Our Holy Rabbis Z’L said: “For 3 sins the person is punished in this world and he has no share in the world to Come [OLAM HA BA]: Idolatry, forbidden relations and murder and LASHON HA RA is as grave as the 3 put together” Our Sages Z’L brought proofs of this from the scriptures. The RISHONIM [Sages who lived around 600-1300

years ago] explain that this refers to those who are in the habit of committing this sin continually, and do not take it upon themselves to guard from this sin, for in their minds it has become like something which is permitted.

**IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE IF ONE RELATES  
LASHON HA RA OUT OF ONE'S OWN  
INITIATIVE OR OUT OF BEING COMPELLED  
BY OTHERS TO SAY LASHON HA RA**

5- Regarding the prohibition against relating LASHON HA RA it makes no difference whether one spoke on his own initiative, because he wanted to, or whether someone else was insistent with him, talking and pleading with him until he related the story, in both instances it is forbidden. And even his father and his Rabbi, whom he is obligated to honor and revere, and not to contradict their words, if they ask him to tell them about a certain matter, and he knows that within the report he will inevitably will come to speak LASHON HA RA or even just AVAK LASHON HA RA, he is forbidden to comply with their request.

**EVEN IF IT ENTAILS LOOSING ONE'S JOB ONE  
MUST AVOID TALKING LASHON HA RA**

6- Even if one sees that if he accustoms himself to this trait of never speaking LASHON HA RA about any Jew and other similar forbidden reports, it will cause him a major loss of livelihood; for example where he is employed by others, and they are people who do not have the spirit of Torah learning; and as is known, due to our many transgressions people of this sort are very licentious regarding this severe sin, even to the

extent that if they see someone who is not as prone to open his mouth as they are, they consider him a fool and a simpleton, and due to this they will dismiss him from his job, and he will have no income to support his family, nevertheless even in these circumstances one is forbidden to speak LASHON HA RA, just as with all other negative commandments, concerning which one is obligated to give up everything he owns rather than transgress one of them as it is explained in YORE DEAH (157:1)

**BETTER FOR A PERSON TO LOOSE HIS HONOR  
THAN TO SIN TO HASHEM, G-D FORBID**

7- And from this we can discern that, all the more so, if it is only one's honor that is at stake, for example he is sitting with a group of people and there is no way to slip away from them, and they are speaking things that are forbidden according to Halacha, and if he sits silently and does not add anything at all to their tales he will appear in their eyes, like one who is mentally deranged-- certainly it is forbidden. About this and similar situations our Sages Z'L said (EDUYOT 5:6) "It is better for a person to be called a fool all his life, than to be wicked for one moment in the eyes of the Almighty".

**ONE SHOULD MUSTER ALL OF ONE'S  
STRENGTH IN ORDER TO  
WITHSTAND THE TRIALS**

He should muster all his strength to control himself at the moment of trial, and he can be confident in his heart that he will receive infinite reward for this from HASHEM, Blessed be He. As our Sages said (AVOT 5:23) "The Reward for a

Mitzvah is in proportion to the suffering endured in fulfilling it” And it is stated (AVOT DE RABBI NATAN 3:6) “A hundred times with suffering more than one without suffering” This means that when one has to suffer in order to do a Mitzvah or refrain from a transgression, his reward is a hundred times greater than when he does the identical Mitzvah without suffering. And concerning this kind of situation the following saying of our Sages Z’L in the Midrash (EVEN SHELEMA 7:1) is very appropriate: “Every single moment that a person keeps his mouth closed, he merits the light which no angel or person can imagine”...

**LASHON HA RA INCLUDES SPEAKING AS  
WELL AS WRITING AND ALSO INCLUDES  
DENIGRATING SOMEONE THROUGH  
BODILY GESTURES**

8- This prohibition of LASHON HA RA applies whether one actually speaks about the person with his mouth or whether he writes about the person in his writing. Likewise it makes no difference whether one relates one’s LASHON HA RA about him explicitly or relates the LASHON HA RA about him by way of bodily gesture. In all forms, it is in the category of LASHON HA RA.

**EVEN IF ONE INCLUDES ONESELF IN THE  
LASHON HA RA IT IS FORBIDDEN TO SAY  
ANYTHING DAMAGING ABOUT  
SOMEONE ELSE**

9- And you must further know that even if within the damaging things that one said about his friend to denigrate

him, he also included himself with these damaging words, and even if he begins by disparaging himself first regarding this defect, even so it does not escape the category of LASHON HA RA.

## **OTHER LAWS SELECTED FROM THE SEFER CHAFETZ CHAYIM**

### **THE MORE PEOPLE LISTENING THE GRAVER THE SIN**

1- It is forbidden to speak LASHON HA RA about one's fellow Jew even if the information related is true. This applies even if one speaks to a single individual, and all the more so if one speaks to many people. And the more listeners there are, the greater is the sin of the speaker, because one's fellow is disparaged more through this, since the disparagement is publicized in front of many people. Moreover through this one causes many people to commit the transgression of listening to LASHON HA RA. (This is the unanimous opinion of all the Poskim.)

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 2:1

### **HEAVEN FORBID THAT ONE ADDS SOMETHING TO THE STORY HE SAYS FOR THEN HIS SIN IS MUCH GRAVER**

Everything we have said [until now] relates to the prohibition against [repeating] the [disparaging] utterance itself. But heaven forbid that one should add even a single word or add "flavor" to the matter for one's listener by saying that the incident related about Shimon 'fits his personality' and the

like. That is certainly forbidden under all circumstances. For through one's comments one causes him more harm than would have been [caused] to him ultimately, through the process of "your friend has a friend," by [the original disparagement] itself. Furthermore, this [the fact that one adds a comment] proves that one has accepted this [disparagement] as the truth. And this [believing the disparagement unreservedly] is forbidden under all circumstances, according to all authorities CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 2:9

**THE GRAVE SIN COMMITTED BY THOSE WHO  
RIDICULE OR SPEAK LASHON HA RA ABOUT  
THOSE WHO SAY WORDS OF  
TORAH AND REBUKE**

...In the majority of cases, this ridicule is common among those people who have no fear of Hashem upon their faces. Hence when they hear words of exhortation and reprove concerning negligence in Torah observance, [such rebuke] runs counter to their desire, as it is said (Mishlei 15:12): "The scornful person does not love the one who reproves him." Thus they see fit to find some defect in the one who is delivering the reproof. And in truth the Sages have already stated in Perek Asarah Yochasin (Kiddushin 70a): "When one finds fault in others, it is a reflection of his own faults." [This is] especially [blameworthy] since in many instances it is commonly found that there is nothing to ridicule...Let us consider, then: If the talk is not in accord with the preference [of the listener], is it proper to say that his words are of no substance? That is a total falsehood...

SEFER CHAFETZ CHAYIM 2:12 HAGOH

**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO RELATE PRIVATE  
INFORMATION ABOUT SOMEONE**

It is forbidden to relate private information you have been told by a friend to other people as this could cause your friend embarrassment or financial loss.

**CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 2: 13**

**LASHON HA RA IS FORBIDDEN EVEN  
WITHOUT MENTIONING NAMES IF THE  
LISTENER WILL KNOW WHO THE SUBJECT IS**

It is forbidden to speak LASHON HA RA even if we don't mention the name of the person when it is understood that we are referring to him. If the listener knows or can deduce who the subject of the LASHON HA RA is then it is forbidden to say it.

**CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 3: 4**

**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO SAY ANYTHING  
DEROGATORY ABOUT SOMEONE AS A JOKE**

It is forbidden to speak LASHON HA RA by way of a joke. Even if you don't hate the person and even if your intention is not to denigrate the person, it is still forbidden to say anything derogatory about him by way of jesting.

**CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 3: 5**

**A GREAT PRINCIPLE AND A GREAT RULE: TO  
JUDGE ONE'S FELLOW FAVORABLY**

Another great principle and an important rule is when you see your friend doing or saying something that may not be correct to judge him favorably. If it is known that your friend is G-d



fearing then even if he does something that might seem wrongful, you are obligated to judge him favorably.

If your friend is of an average conduct and sometimes he guards himself from sin and sometimes he doesn't, then you should judge him favorably and regarding this our Sages wrote: (Shabbat 127) "Whoever judges his fellow favorably, Hashem will judge him favorably"...

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 3: 7

**RELATING SOMEONE'S FAULTS IN ORDER TO  
PREVENT YOUR SONS AND STUDENTS  
TO LEARN FROM HIM**

If a person sees faulty traits in someone like arrogance, anger, lack of diligence in Torah study, it is proper to tell his sons and his students to warn them not to befriend that person so that they don't learn from his actions.

**THE PROHIBITION OF LASHON HA RA  
APPLIES WHEN SOMEONE SAYS SOMETHING  
TO HARM HIS FRIEND BUT IF THE INTENT IS  
TO PREVENT OTHERS FROM SINNING  
THEN IT IS A MITZVAH**

For the prohibition on disparaging others is only when the words are said with the intent to belittle and disgrace the person spoken about.

But if the intent is to alert others not to follow in the footsteps of someone who has faulty traits, it is permitted to mention that person's faults, and it is even considered a mitzvah.

**IT IS PROPER TO REVEAL TO YOUR SONS OR  
STUDENTS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR REMARKS  
ABOUT THE PERSON WHO DOESN'T  
GO IN THE RIGHT PATH**

It is necessary in such cases to clearly explain the purpose of your derogatory words in order to avoid misunderstanding on the part of your children or students. If an entire community acts improperly and you fear that someone might copy their faults, you are permitted to point out their shortcomings in order to prevent a person from mingling with them...

**CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 4: 10**

**IT IS PERMITTED TO INQUIRE REGARDING A  
POTENTIAL PARTNER OR A POTENTIAL  
GROOM OR BRIDE**

Another great principle regarding these matters is that when someone wants to go into a partnership with someone or if he is marrying someone, even if up until now, one hasn't heard anything bad about that potential partner, even so it is permitted to ask and investigate from other people as regards to his character and conduct, and even that it is possible that they will relate to him bad things about that potential partner it is still permitted to ask, for one's intention is only for one's good, so that he later will not need to come to strife and damages and desecration of Hashem's name G-d forbid...

**ONE MUST REVEAL HIS INTENTIONS BEFORE  
BEING ANSWERED BY HIS FELLOW**

But one must reveal to whom one is inquiring from, one's intentions and in this way there will be no possibility of

transgression for oneself and for the one who will relate the information.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 4: 11

**THE STEPS TO DO TESHUVAH FOR  
HAVING SPOKEN LASHON HA RA  
IF YOUR LASHON HA RA CAUSED NO HARM  
THEN YOU ASK FORGIVENESS  
ONLY FROM HASHEM**

(A) If the listeners did not believe what you have told them, and their esteem for the person spoken about was not lessened, the sin is considered ben adam lamakom (you have violated Hashem's commandments but have not harmed your friend). The procedure for doing Teshuvah in such instances is the same as in all other violations of mitzvot ben adam lamakom:

- (1) You must sincerely regret what you have done (charata).
- (2) You must confess to Hashem Yisborach (viduy).
- (3) You must be resolved never to repeat your sin.

**IF YOUR LASHON HA RA CAUSED HARM TO  
YOUR FELLOW JEW THEN YOU MUST ASK  
YOUR FRIEND FOR FORGIVENESS AND ONLY  
THEN YOU CAN ASK HASHEM  
FOR FORGIVENESS**

(B) However, if the listeners believed the LASHON HARA, and the person spoken about was lowered in their esteem and he thereby suffered physical damage, financial loss, or mental anguish, the sin is considered ben adam lachavero (a sin against a fellow Jew), for which even the day of death and Yom Kippur do not expiate until he asks his friend for forgiveness

until he is appeased. In such instances you are obligated to request forgiveness from the person who suffered because of your LASHON HARA. Afterwards you are only left with a sin between man and Hashem for which you must also follow the above-mentioned steps for Teshuvah...

**YOU MUST RUN AWAY FROM LASHON HA RA  
FOR YOU MAY DO DAMAGE FOR WHICH  
THERE IS NO REPAIR**

From here you can understand how evil is this sin and how much must a man be careful about not transgressing it, for whoever constantly talks LASHON HA RA, it is almost impossible for him to do Teshuvah for how will he remember the countless people that he has damaged through his LASHON HA RA and even those whom he remembers, they will not know about his LASHON HA RA and he will be ashamed to reveal to them what he said about them. And sometimes this person will say something derogatory about a whole family and about these people our Sages said (Yerushalmi Baba Kamma 8:7): “Whoever talks about any defect of a particular family has no expiation forever” Therefore one has to run away from this sin as much as possible in order to avoid doing something for which there will be no correction afterwards

**CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 4: 11**

**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO BELIEVE THE LASHON  
HA RA THAT YOU HEAR; IT IS FORBIDDEN TO  
LISTEN LASHON HA RA**

According to the Torah it is forbidden to listen to LASHON HA RA, even if you do not intend to believe what is spoken.

If you inadvertently listen to LASHON HA RA you are forbidden to believe it is true and your perception of the person should not change because of what you heard.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 6: 1-2

**WHEN YOU CAN DEFEND THE SUBJECT OF LASHON HA RA AND PROVE THAT WHAT IS BEING SAID IS NOT ACCURATE THEN IT IS A MITZVAH TO LISTEN TO LASHON HA RA**

Sometimes it is a Mitzvah for you to listen to one who is saying something derogatory about one's fellow, for in that way after listening to everything this person is saying, you will be able to prove the speaker and all those who are there that the story is not so, and bring merit to the person that was being denigrated.

**WHEN YOU CAN APPEASE YOUR FRIEND BY LISTENING TO HIM SO THAT HE THEN DOESN'T REPEAT THE STORY TO ANYBODY ELSE AND HIS ANGER SUBSIDES THEN IT IS A MITZVAH TO LISTEN TO HIS LASHON HA RA**

And there is another situation in which it is a Mitzvah to hear LASHON HA RA, for when someone comes complaining about what someone did to him, and he knows that if he listens to him then his anger will dissipate, and then he will not repeat the story to others (for maybe others will believe the story and will in by listening and believing to LASHON HA RA) and therefore peace will be increased among the Jews.

**NEVERTHELESS IN THE ABOVE TWO  
SITUATIONS YOU MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO  
BELIEVE THE LASHON HA RA YOU HEAR**

But regarding these two situations in which there is permission to listen to LASHON HA RA, one must be careful that one does not believe the information, so that he does not stumble on the sin of accepting LASHON HA RA.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 6: 4

**IT IS AN OBLIGATION TO REBUKE THOSE  
WHO ARE SPEAKING LASHON HA RA AND IF  
YOU DON'T REBUKE THEM  
YOU WILL BE PUNISHED**

If you are in the company of people who are speaking LASHON HA RA, you are obligated to rebuke them. If you remain silent, you will be held responsible for their sins. Even if you feel certain that the people speaking LASHON HA RA will not heed your rebuke, you are nonetheless obligated to admonish them. Silence on your part will be mistakenly construed as approval.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 6: 4 (Beer Mayim Chayim 9)

**IF YOU ARE MADE TO LISTEN TO LASHON  
HARA THEN DON'T BELIEVE IT AND FIND  
DISPLEASURE IN YOUR HAVING  
TO LISTEN TO IT**

If you are among people who begin to relate LASHON HA RA in your presence and will not accept your rebuke, you should do the following: If it is possible to leave their company or to plug your ears with your finger, you are doing a great Mitzvah.

But if you are unable to leave their company or to plug your ears for they will denigrate you, then you will watch over yourself and fight the battles of Hashem in order to overpower your Yetzer ha Ra so that you don't stumble in the violation of the commandment from the Torah of listening and believing LASHON HA RA. Here you will need to do three things in order to save yourself from the Torah prohibitions we mentioned:

(A) Be resolved not to believe in your soul anything about the damaging things that you hear.

(B) Feel displeasure from having to listen to the LASHON HA RA.

(C) Do not show any outward sign of agreement with the speakers, and you should sit mute as a rock. If it is at all possible, you should vocally or through facial expression convey your annoyance at what they are saying.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 6: 5

**WHAT IS FORBIDDEN TO SAY AS LASHON HA RA IS WHAT IS FORBIDDEN TO LISTEN TO OR TO BE BELIEVED AS LASHON HA RA**

Any statement which is forbidden to relate because it is LASHON HA RA is forbidden to hear or (if already heard) to be believed. This includes listening to and believing tales about improper actions, faulty character traits, lack of intelligence, or the misdeeds of someone's family. The manner in which the LASHON HA RA was conveyed to you (through writing, hinting, or signaling) is of no consequence and does not affect the severity of the offense.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 6: 9

### **TESHUVAH FOR BELIEVING LASHON HA RA**

If you believed LASHON HA RA and you want to do Teshuvah for having believed it, then you must do the following:

- 1-Be resolved not to believe what you heard already.
- 2- Accept upon yourself never to listen or believe LASHON HA RA in the future.
- 3- Confess your transgression to Hashem.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 6: 12

### **IT IS FORBIDDEN TO SPEAK LASHON HA RA ABOUT YOUR RELATIVES AND IT IS FORBIDDEN TO RELATE LASHON HA RA TO YOUR RELATIVES**

It is forbidden to speak LASHON HA RA about your relatives and this includes your wife, parents, brothers, sisters and uncles and this applies even if you have no harmful intentions. You are also forbidden to relate LASHON HA RA even to your closest relatives including your wife, parents, brothers, etc.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 8: 1-2

### **WHEN DEALING WITH SOMEONE [AN APIKOROS] WHO DENIES THE DIVINITY OF THE TORAH, EVEN ONE SINGLE LAW OF THE TORAH, IT IS A MITZVAH TO HUMILIATE AND DENIGRATE HIM**

The prohibition against speaking LASHON HA RA does not apply when the person spoken about is an apikoros.



An apikoros is someone who denies the divinity of the Torah, either the Written Law or Oral Law, in its entirety or any segment thereof. And even if he says all the Torah is from Hashem besides one verse or besides one logical inference, he is considered an apikoros.

It is actually a mitzvah to deride and disgrace an apikoros in his presence or absence.

**IT IS AN OBLIGATION TO  
HATE THE APIKOROS**

It is obligatory to hate those who cause others to forsake Torah observance. For they are not considered to be in the category of your friend and your people and then the Mitzvah to love your fellow as yourself does not include them. As King David has said in Tehillim (139: 21-22), "G-d, do I not hate those who cause others to hate you? And do I not quarrel with those who rise up against you. I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them as my enemies." Avon DE RABI NATAN

**ALL THE ABOVE APPLIES IF YOU HAVE  
HEARD THE PERSON UTTER THE APIKORSUT;  
OTHERWISE YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO  
DISPARAGE HIM**

The above applies only if you have personally heard someone uttering apikorsut. If you have merely heard from others that a person has spoken apikorsut, you are forbidden to disparage him. In such instances you are only permitted to be cautious. You cannot accept what you have heard as the absolute truth. You are permitted, however, to privately warn others to beware of the person, until the matter is clarified. When it is

established that someone is an apikoros, it is as if you have personal knowledge, and you are permitted to speak LASHON HA RA about him.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 8: 5

**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO PRAISE SOMEONE  
EXCESSIVELY AS THIS WILL  
LEAD TO LASHON HA RA**

You are forbidden to praise someone excessively, even if the listeners don't dislike him, for you are likely to add something derogatory within your praise. Also, excessive praise can easily encourage the listeners to try and refute you by mentioning the faults of the subject.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 9: 1

**KEEP AWAY FROM PEOPLE WHO SPEAK  
LASHON HA RA AND WHEN POSSIBLE YOU  
SHOULD CHANGE THE SUBJECT**

Keep away from people who speak LASHON HA RA. If you know that someone habitually relates LASHON HA RA, make sure that your conversations with him are short. You are forbidden to live near a habitual speaker of LASHON HA RA [BAAL LASHON HA RA] - "Woe to the wicked-, woe to his neighbor" (Such 56b).

You must be very careful in the synagogue or yeshiva not to sit near people who are lax in guarding their speech. If someone tries to tell you LASHON HA RA and you are not able to rebuke him, change the subject! You should talk then about permissible things and you will save yourself from sin

CHAFETZ CHAYIM KLAL 9: 4

### **A FEW LAWS CONCERNING RECHILUT**

Rechilut is reporting to someone what others have done or spoken about him. The Torah forbids Rechilut explicitly in the verse (Vaykira 19:16): “Do not go as a Tale bearer among your people” It is forbidden to listen to Rechilut even if you do not know whether to believe it or not. And in the event that you happen to listen to Rechilut, it is forbidden to accept it as truth. You are permitted sometimes to listen to Rechilut if you feel that knowing what you hear will protect you from harm but likewise you are not permitted to accept the Rechilut as the absolute truth. You are permitted to be cautious based on what you have heard.

#### **CHAFETZ CHAYIM LAWS OF RECHILUT**

### **DON'T ASK CONSTANTLY WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT YOU**

Certain individuals have a habit of constantly asking people to tell them what others have said about them, and they inquire out of curiosity, not because they will gain any practical benefit from the information. If they are told someone has spoken disparagingly about them, they tend to believe it wholeheartedly, and consequently much hatred is engendered. Unless you are quite sure that the information is necessary for you to know in order to guard yourself against damage, don't ask others: "What did he say about me?" And even so you are obligated to give the benefit of the doubt to the person you asked about.

#### **CHAFETZ CHAYIM LAWS OF RECHILUT KLAL 5: 5**

**GIVING OTHERS THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT**

If you know for certain that someone has spoken or acted against you, but it is possible that he did not mean to harm you, you are obligated to give him the benefit of the doubt. If instead, as a result of what someone has told you, you assume that the person had a malicious intent, you are guilty of believing Rechilut.

CHAFETZ CHAYIM LAWS OF RECHILUT KLAL 5: 6

*“It is better for a person to be called a fool all his life, than to be wicked for one moment in the eyes of the Almighty”.*  
(EDUYOT 5:6)

*“When one finds fault in others, it is a reflection of his own faults.”*  
(Kiddushin 70a)

*“Whoever talks about any defect of a particular family has no expiation forever”*  
(Yerushalmi Baba Kamma 8:7)

## CHAPTER 4

### IGGERET HAGRA THE VILNA GAON'S LETTER

(Sent by the Gaon, R. Eliyahu, of blessed memory while traveling to Israel, to instruct his family in the ways of G-d).

#### REFRAIN FROM BECOMING SAD

I came to ask you to refrain from becoming sad, as you promised me truthfully, and not to worry. Men leave their wives in order to travel and wander destitute for years to make money. But I, thank G-d, am traveling to the Holy Land - which everyone longs to see, Israel's Most Beloved (or: Hashem's Most Beloved, all heavenly and earthly beings desire it). And I am traveling in peace, thank G-d. You are also aware that I have left behind my children, for whom my heart yearns, and all my precious books, and I am as a stranger in a foreign land. I have left everything behind.

#### ALL IN THE WORLD IS VANITY

And it is known that all this world, it is all emptiness, that every amusement is worthless, and woe to those who pursue vanity, which is worthless. And don't envy wealth, for "riches are kept by their owner to his misfortune" (Kohelet 5:12); "As he came out from his mother's womb, naked will he return...exactly as he came he must depart, and what did he gain by toiling for the wind?" (Kohelet. 5: 14, 15); "Even if he should live a thousand years twice over, but find no contentment - do not all go to the same place?" (ibid 6:6);

“Even if man lives many years, let him rejoice in all of them, but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is futility” (ibid 11:8); “And of joy, what does it accomplish?” (ibid 2:2). Tomorrow you will cry for having laughed today.

### **DO NOT LUST AFTER IMAGINARY HONOR**

Do not lust after imaginary honor, which is similar to vanity, and time is a traitor and like scales, lifts the light and lowers the heavy. The world is like one who drinks salty water: he thinks it quenches his thirst, but it only makes him thirstier (Bechar ha Pninim). No one leaves the world with even half his cravings fulfilled (Kohelet Rabbah 1). "What profit does one have from all his labor under the sun" (Kohelet 1:3)? Remember our predecessors, all of whose love, desire and joy have disappeared (see Kohelet 9:6), but who are being judged severely for them. And of what benefit is gratification to man - whose end is dust, maggots and worms, as he is bound to die - when all his enjoyments turn to bitterness in the grave? And what is this world, whose days are full of anger and pain, and its nights where sleeping brings no rest? Neither is death a mikveh.

### **LASHON HA RA IS THE WORST SIN OF ALL AND MAN IS JUDGED FOR EVERYTHING HE SAYS**

Man will be judged for everything he says; even the slightest expression is not overlooked. Therefore I warn you to train yourself to sit alone as much as possible, because the sin of the

tongue is the most severe, as our Sages said (Tosefta Pe'ah 1): “These are the things...and LASHON HA RA is equivalent to them all.” And what need is there for me to elaborate on this most serious sin, the worst of all. “All man's labor is for his mouth” (Kohelet 6:7). Our Sages said that all man's mitzvot and all his Torah are not enough to counterbalance what comes out of his mouth.

### **A MAN SHOULD STRIVE TO BECOME AS A MUTE**

“What should be a man's occupation in this world? He should become as a mute person” (Chullin 89a). One must seal his lips as tight as two millstones. And all the punishment of Kaf ha Kela (the hollow of the sling, a punishment for the soul after death) comes from the breath of idle words and for every idle word one must be thrown from one end of the world to the other. Now this is true concerning mere permitted speech.

### **ONE CAN'T IMAGINE THE SUFFERING AND THE PUNISHMENT FOR LASHON HA RA**

Where forbidden speech is concerned - e.g. LASHON HA RA, mocking, swearing, vowing, fighting and cursing - especially in the synagogue, and on Shabbat and Yom Tov - for every utterance of this type one descends to the sheol, very very low, and it is impossible to imagine the pain and suffering one will receive for one utterance (Zohar)! No word is lost; everything is recorded. Winged beings attach themselves to everyone,

recording all they say. “For a bird of the skies may carry the sound, and some winged creature may tell the matter” (Kohelet 10:20). *“Let not your mouth cause your flesh to sin, and do not tell the messenger that it was an error. Why should G-d be angered by your speech and destroy the work of your hands?”* (*ibid* 5:5). Purchase all your needs through a messenger, even if this costs you two or three times as much. “Is there a limit to what G-d can provide?” (Bamidbar 11:23). G-d feeds all creatures, from the greatest to the smallest (Avodah Zara 3), and provides to each one all his needs.

## **HONOR THE SHABBAT BY NOT TALKING**

And on Shabbat and Yom Tov do not speak at all about things that are not urgent, and be brief even with what is important, for the Shabbat is very holy and our Sages barely permitted the exchange of greetings (Yerushalmi Shabbat, and Tosfot Shabbat 113). See how strict they were concerning even a single expression! Keep giving great honor to the Shabbat as when I was there. Do not cut back [on your Shabbat] expenses, since “Man's entire sustenance [for the year is fixed for him from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur,] except [the expenditure for Sabbaths and Festivals,] etc.” (Beitzah 16a). I also implore and plead with you to guide your daughters very carefully to refrain from cursing, swearing, lying and fighting. Rather, everything should be done peacefully, with love, affection and gentleness.



## **TEACH GOOD CONDUCT TO YOUR CHILDREN THROUGH THE STUDY OF MUSSAR**

I have left behind several books on Mussar (proper conduct). See that [the children] read them constantly, especially on the Holy Shabbat, when Mussar is the only thing they should occupy themselves with. Always instruct them according to Mussar books. Don't hold back from hitting them when they curse, swear or lie. Don't have mercy for them, because parents will be punished severely for the corruption of their children, G-d forbid. And even if one constantly teaches them Mussar, but they do not follow it, Woe to the sorrow and shame in the World to Come. As it is written (Vayikra 21:9), "She defiles her father"- [in such a case] the wicked son of a righteous man is called "the wicked son of a wicked man" (Sanhedrin 52a). Similarly in other matters, LASHON HA RA, gossip, their eating and drinking as well should always be preceded and followed by the appropriate blessings. They must be careful to say the blessings, Birkat Hamazon and Kriat Shema with proper kavanah (intent). Most importantly, they must not wander outside the home and must obey and respect you and my mother and all their elders. They also need to observe all that is written in the Mussar books.

### **PROCURE GOOD TUTORS FOR THE CHILDREN**

Raise your own children as well correctly and sensitively, and pay their tutor well, for "Man's entire sustenance for the year is fixed for him from Rosh Hashanah...except TiShReY (Talmud, Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Yom Tov - Beitzah 16a).

I have also left books for them. For Hashem's sake, guide them well and gently. Take care of their health and make sure that they always have enough to eat. First have them learn the entire Chumash, seeing to it that they know it almost by heart. The learning must be done without undue pressure, rather gently, because the studies are only fixed in man when there is tranquility. Give them coins, etc., as a reward.

### **CONCENTRATE ON THE SERVICE OF G-D FOR ALL ELSE IS TRIVIAL**

Always focus your attention on these matters and not on others, because all else is trivial. For man can salvage nothing from his labor to take with him, except two white garments (shrouds). Also (Tehillim 49), "A man will not redeem his brother...Fear not when a man grows rich...For when he dies, he shall carry nothing away...." Don't say, "I will leave a portion for my children" - who will tell you in the grave? The children of man are like grasses of the field, some blossom and some fade (Eruvin 54a). Each one is born under his constellation and is guided by the Highest G-d Blessed be He, they are glad when he dies and he goes into the sheol. [At his passing] Resh Lakish left his children a kav of saffron, and he applied to himself the verse (Tehillim 49:11), "...and they leave their wealth to others" (Gittin 47a).

### **WOE TO THOSE WHO PLAN ON LEAVING THEIR WEALTH TO THEIR CHILDREN**

Woe to all who plan on leaving [wealth] to their children! The only reward from sons and daughters is through their Torah and good deeds. Their sustenance is fixed for them. It is also

known that women earn merit by making their children learn Torah, etc. (Berachot 17a). And our Sages said (Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Rabba 9): "The only proper wife is one that does her husband's will." I am indeed writing you words of the Living G-d. Therefore, I am certain that you will follow all that I have written. Nevertheless, I wish to strongly warn you not to deviate from anything that I have written.

### **AVOID IDLE TALK AND LASHON HA RA ON SHABBAT**

Read this letter every week, especially on Shabbat before and during the meal, in order to prevent idle talk and, even worse, LASHON HA RA and the like, G-d forbid. I reiterate my request that you guide your sons and daughters with words of kindness and Mussar that will find a fixed place in their heart. This is true especially if we merit to arrive in Eretz Israel, because there one must very much follow Hashem's ways. Therefore, train them often, since one must work hard on one's speech and character traits, and only through perseverance can we control ourselves (Shaare Teshuvah). All beginnings are hard (Mechilta Yitro). But afterwards, one is worthy of praise (Proverbs 20:14). For the wicked person knows that he is taking the wrong path, but it is hard for him to change.

### **CONTROL OF THE MOUTH IS THE MAIN TASK IN LIFE**

But this is man's main task, not to go after his desires, but (Psalms 32:9) "To restrain himself with a bit and bridle when he is being groomed." Man must deprive himself until he dies,

not by fasting or asceticism, but by controlling his mouth and desires. This is teshuvah. And this is the whole reward of the World-to-Come, as it is written (Proverbs 6:23): “For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah is a light” - but “the way to life is the rebuke that disciplines.” And that is worth more than any amount of fasting and self-affliction!

### **EVERY SECOND THAT ONE CONTROLS HIS MOUTH HE MERITS THE HIDDEN LIGHT WHICH NO ANGEL CAN IMAGINE**

For every second that man controls his tongue, he merits some of the “hidden [by G-d for the righteous] light,” something which no angel or [other] creature can imagine (Midrash). And it is stated (Psalms 34:13,14): “Who is the man who desires life, and loves days that he may see good? Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceitfully.”

### **CONTROLLING ONE’S MOUTH ATONES FOR ALL SINS**

This will atone for any sin and save one from the lower Sheol, as we find (Proverbs 21:23): “He who guards his mouth [from permitted eating and drinking] and tongue [from idle words] guards himself from trouble.” Also (Proverbs 18:21): “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Woe to one who gives away his life for one word! Then what advantage is there to one who has a tongue (see Kohelet 10:11)? And, “Everything has a cure except, etc.”

## **DON'T PRAISE ANYONE AND DON'T SPEAK ILL OF ANYBODY**

It is most important to refrain from speaking words of praise about anyone. How much more so does this apply to speaking ill of anyone! Why must one speak about others? “The mouth that speaks strangely is a deep pit; he angers G-d and falls into it” (Proverbs 22:14).

## **AVOID JEALOUSY AND LASHON HARA EVEN IF IT MEANS NOT GOING TO SYNAGOGUE**

Concerning solitude, the main thing is not to go outside of home. Even your visit to the synagogue should be very short. In fact, it is better to pray at home, for it is impossible to be spared from jealousy or from hearing idle talk or LASHON HA RA in the synagogue. And one receives punishment for this, as we find (Shabbat 33a), “Also one who hears and is silent...” This is even the more so on Shabbat and Yom Tov when they gather to talk - It is then better that you don't pray at all. Refrain also from going to the cemetery (especially women), as all impurities stick to women there and all sorrow and sin comes from this. It is also advisable that your daughter not go to the synagogue, because she'll see beautiful clothes there, become jealous and talk about it at home. This will lead to LASHON HA RA, etc. She should rather cling to Mussar and not become jealous of anything in this world, where everything is vanity and illusions, appearing and disappearing overnight (Yonah 4:10). “Though he grows as high as the sky, his head reaching the clouds, he perishes forever...” (Iyov

20:6,7). “For property does not last forever, or a crown for all generations” (Mishlei 27:24). And even while it exists it is worthless, loathsome and disdained by any sensible person. Woe to him who is impressed by it.

### **ENVY ONLY THOSE WHO FEAR HASHEM**

Envy only the fear of Hashem (ibid 23:17). She should not say, “How can I earn a share in the World-to-Come? - I can't do it!” For we have learned (Berachot 17a): “One may do much or one may do little, provided he directs his heart to heaven.” For the sake of Hashem, give a fifth of all earnings to charity. Do not give less, as I have already warned you, because that causes the transgression of several positive and negative mitzvot every minute! It also implies a rejection of the Holy Torah, G-d forbid.

### **THE MAIN MERIT FOR THE WORLD TO COME IS BY GUARDING ONE'S TONGUE**

But the main way to merit Olam Habba is by guarding one's tongue. That is worth more than all the Torah and good deeds. This is the meaning of (Isaiah 32:9) “tranquil women” (Berachot 17a), because the mouth is the holiest of the holy.

### **READ MUSSAR THAT WILL LEAD TO PRACTICE**

Among my books is a copy of the book of Proverbs with Yiddish translation. For the sake of Hashem, have them read it daily. It is better than any Mussar book. They should also read

Kohelet a lot, because it points out the vanity of this world, and other books as well. But G-d forbid that reading should be the objective! Reading Mussar alone does not necessarily move one to act differently. Going out into the world without a good understanding of it defeats the whole purpose. It is like one who sows without having plowed; the wind and birds will carry the seeds away, because they aren't closed off and protected. So is he who merely reads Mussar like him who plants without a fence; pigs will eat and trample on everything. Some plant on stone. This is comparable to a heart of stone which cannot be penetrated unless it is struck until it breaks open. That's why I wrote you to hit our children if they don't obey you. "Train a lad in the way he ought to go" (Proverbs 22:6). This is an important principle of education. I also wish to appeal to my son-in-law to adhere to all the above. Read to the children as I have stated and learn for the sake of Heaven. Become well versed in it for Hashem's sake. Don't pay attention to those who say that it is unnecessary for the child, G-d forbid. To the contrary, "Train a lad, etc." It is easier to remove the skin of a nut before it hardens into a shell.

### **THROUGH THE STUDY OF TORAH FOR ITS OWN SAKE ONE MERITS EVERYTHING**

Most importantly, it is through such study that one merits everything, as our Sages stated (Pirkei Avot 6:1): "Rabbi Meir said: Whoever studies Torah for its own sake merits many things; furthermore, the whole world is worthwhile for his sake

alone”. You should study Tractate Avot, especially Avot D'Rabbi Natan, and Tractate Derech Eretz, since Derech Eretz (good manners) are more important than Torah study. Honor both your mother-in-law and your children's great grandmother. Also always treat everyone with politeness and respect.

### **IT IS A GRAVE SIN TO CAUSE PAIN TO WIDOWS**

My Dear Mother, I know that you don't need my advice, because you are very modest. Nevertheless, I wish someone would read this letter to you, for it consists of words of the Living G-d. I beg of you not to grieve over me, as you promised me, and G-d willing, if I merit to arrive at the gate of heaven in the holy city of Jerusalem, I will pray for you as I promised. And if we deserve it, we shall all be reunited, please G-d. I also ask my wife to honor my mother, as the Torah dictates, especially since she is a widow to whom it is a grave sin to cause even the slightest pain.

### **THE MAIN THING IS TO BRING JOY TO MAN**

I also ask you, Mother, to please cause peace to reign between you, and that you should strive to bring happiness to one another. This is a great mitzvah incumbent upon everyone, as we find (Reshit Chochmah): “When man is judged, he will be asked, “Did you make your fellow a king over you?” We see



that one must gladly enhance his friend's honor. In fact, the main goal of the Torah is to bring joy to man.

### MAKE PEACE FOR HASHEM'S SAKE

Even if one of you should happen to act improperly, excuse each other and live in peace for Hashem's name. I also ask of you, Mother, to supervise and guide my children with gentle words, so that they will accept them. I instruct my sons and daughters to honor her, and not to fight among themselves at all, but to settle everything peacefully. May the Master of Peace grant you, my sons, daughters, sons-in-law, brother and all Israel life and peace. Your loving Eliyahu the son of R. Shlomo Zalman ztz'l

*...R' Yehoshua taught: "If a word is worth one coin, silence is worth two." Rabbi [Yehudah the Prince] said: "The best medicine of all is silence," as stated (Avot 1:17) in the name of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel: "All my days I have been raised among the Sages and I have found nothing better for oneself than silence." (Kohelet Rabba 5:3)*

*Man will be judged for everything he says, even the slightest expression is not overlooked. Therefore I warn you to train yourself to sit alone as much as possible, because the sin of the tongue is the most severe IGGERET HA GRA*

## CHAPTER 5

### AN EXPLANATION ON THE GRAVITY OF THE SIN OF LASHON HA RA

#### THE PERSON IS JUDGED MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Hashem created a system of Midda Ke Negged Midda [Measure for measure] to judge His creatures. In the same way that you behave, in that same you will be judged. Who judges your actions? Hashem in his infinite kindness does not want to judge the Jewish people. So there is a tribunal in heaven that sits and judges your actions, and it is the Satan [Which means Accuser in Hebrew] that brings the accusations against the person. This Bet Din or tribunal issues all the decrees that come to the person and to the Jewish people in general.

#### THE SATAN WILL ONLY TALK LASHON HA RA ABOUT YOU WHEN YOU TALK LASHON HA RA ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE

The Bet Din has to wait for the Satan who brings the accusation in order to prosecute you. What the Satan is essentially doing is speaking LASHON HA RA about you. Because he is saying something about you that although true, is nevertheless meant to hurt you. And according to the system of Midda Kenegged Midda, the only way that the Satan gets permission to speak LASHON HA RA about you, in other words permission to accuse, is when you speak LASHON HA RA in this world.

**WHEN YOU TALK LASHON HA RA YOU  
ARE CONDEMNING YOURSELF**

When you condemn others through your LASHON HA RA, the Satan gets permission to prosecute you, therefore when you judge others harshly and talk LASHON HA RA about them, you are essentially judging yourself, for through your words the Satan gets permission to prosecute you in heaven.

**THE SATAN CAN PROSECUTE YOU FOR ANY  
SIN HE WANTS EVERY TIME YOU GIVE HIM  
THE CHANCE THROUGH YOUR SPEAKING  
LASHON HA RA**

And the Satan can prosecute you then for any sin he wishes to prosecute you for, so when you talk LASHON HA RA even if it is something very trivial, the Satan can come and accuse you for the worse sin you have made and the Bet Din is then compelled to hear the Satan. For every piece of LASHON HA RA that you speak, the Satan gets permission to prosecute you. So if you speak LASHON HA RA ten times during one day, The Satan will prosecute you ten times only for that single day of speaking LASHON HARA.

**THE MERCY THAT YOU HAVE PERFORMED  
TO OTHERS PROTECTS YOU AT THE  
TIME OF JUDGMENT**

The Bet Din has to wait for the Satan to accuse but he also has to wait until you speak LASHON HA RA and if you don't then he can not accuse you. And this is a great Chessed (Kindness)

that the Creator does with His creatures. When you talk LASHON HA RA then there is immediate accusation but even then the Bet Din must stand trial and then if you are found guilty they still may have mercy on you if you did acts of kindness to others. As long as you have merits from your Chessed you will be spared but soon your merits will run out and then the Bet Din will issue evil decrees against you, G-d forbid. So it is better then to avoid LASHON HA RA and in this way avoid being prosecuted.

### **WHO IS JUDGED WHEN YOU TALK LASHON HA RA? THE SPEAKER THE LISTENER AND THE SUBJECT**

**The speaker:** For speaking LASHON HA RA, the Satan gets permission to also speak LASHON HA RA against you.

**The Listener:** For when he listens, the Bet Din says: we also want to listen to the Satan.

**The subject:** Most of the AYN HA RA [Evil eye] comes from Lashon ha Ra, for when someone is spoken about, the bet Din goes and checks if that person about whom they spoke LASHON HARA deserves what he has.

### **LET THE MIDDA KENEGGED MIDDA WORK IN YOUR FAVOR BY REFRAINING FROM SPEAKING LASHON HA RA**

When you refrain from engaging in LASHON HA RA you are spared from all this Midda keneged Midda, if you don't speak LASHON HA RA then the Satan will not either. If you don't

listen to LASHON HA RA then the Bet Din will also not listen to the accusation of the Satan. If you are the subject of LASHON HA RA but you have refrained from speaking and listening to LASHON HA RA then the Bet Din will not review your situation.

**WHEN YOU DON'T SPEAK LASHON HA RA YOU  
HAVE MORE TIME TO DO TESHUVAH  
BEFORE YOU ARE JUDGED**

When you speak LASHON HARA judgments come immediately through the Satan and the Bet Din, but if you don't speak LASHON HA RA then the judgment does not come immediately. This will give you time to do Teshuvah and you may be able to remove your sins entirely. And even if you did not do Teshuvah, if you refrain from LASHON HA RA, the one who judges you is not the Satan but the Holy One Himself and His Judgment is always more merciful than that of the Satan together with the Bet Din.

**WHEN HASHEM JUDGES YOU, THE  
PUNISHMENTS ARE LESS SEVERE THAN  
WHEN THE SATAN AND THE BET  
DIN JUDGE YOU**

When the Holy One is your judge the punishments are less severe than when the Satan and the Bet Din are allowed to judge you. If you talk LASHON HA RA then the Holy One can not spare you from the accusations of the Satan and the judgments of the Bet Din because that is the system by which justice is administered. When you engage in LASHON HA RA

you are then exposed to judgment that occurs without the intervention of the Holy One. But on the contrary, if you refrain from engaging in LASHON HA RA then the Holy One will treat you with His abundant mercies, without the intervention of the Satan and the Bet Din. Then He can save you from suffering even if you don't deserve it, for He and only He decides what will happen to you. But if you engage in LASHON HA RA there is no escaping the Satan and the Bet Din.

**IF THE JEWS DON'T TALK LASHON HA RA  
THEN HASHEM CAN SAVE THEM FROM ALL  
SUFFERING**

The Midrash says that if the Jews don't engage in LASHON HA RA, then Hashem can save them from all suffering. And this is why LASHON HA RA is more severe than other sins, for when you engage in LASHON HA RA, the Satan gets permission to accuse you for all your sins, for sins which would otherwise would not be brought in front of the Heavenly tribunal. This is why Achav The King even though he was an idolater was not punished because he did not engage in LASHON HA RA, and then the Satan could not bring to the Bet Din the accusations of idolatry, But King Shaul even though he was righteous, because of LASHON HA RA was accused by the Satan and then punishment was decreed to him by the Bet Din.

Based on the Chafetz Chayyim, Rabbi Moshe Chayyim Luzzato, Zohar and Midrashim

**THERE IS AN INVERSE RELATION BETWEEN  
THE JEWS AND THE SATAN: WHEN ONE IS  
STRONG THE OTHER ONE IS WEAK**

Why are we suffering so much? Why Doesn't Mashiach come? And how can we help make Mashiach come? Hashem sends Shefa [Divine Force] that sustains all of the inhabitants of the world. There's only so much SHEFA and KEDDUSHA for either the Jews or for the SATAN. It either goes to us or to the forces of the other side. When the Jew sins and is judged, then the SHEFA goes to the SATAN and he grows more powerful. And when the Jews have merits then the Satan is weakened.

**HOW DOES THE SATAN FIGHT AGAINST THE  
JEWS? BY MAKING THEM  
SPEAK LASHON HA RA**

But the job of the Satan is to bring accusations to the Jews and how does he achieve this? By enticing us to speak LASHON HA RA, for only then He has power to accuse us in front of the heavenly tribunal. So he concentrates greatly in weakening Jews and driving them to engage in LASHON HA RA and then he can accuse them and get the SHEFA and the KEDDUSHA that should have gone to the Jews. If the Satan gets this SHEFA, then he uses it to further his interests and further make Jews disbelieve in Hashem and engage ultimately in LASHON HA RA against Hashem, G-d forbid.

So even if you sin, as long as you don't engage in LASHON HA RA, the Satan can't accuse you and then the Jews get the SHEFA and the KEDDUSHA which translate into well being and blessings.

Based on the Chafetz Chayim and the Zohar Pekkude

WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY ONE BLESSED BE HE

פז יח[ נ[ אפ נלמנחמ 'ע

*HASHEM WILL FIGHT FOR YOU, AND  
YOU BE SILENT (SHEMOT 14, 14)*

HE WHO CONVERSES ON MUNDANE MATTERS IN THE SYNAGOGUE, WOE TO HIM BECAUSE HE SHOWS SEPARATION (FROM HASHEM), WOE TO HIM BECAUSE HE DAMAGES AND DIMINISHES THE FAITH, WOE TO HIM BECAUSE HE HAS NO PORTION IN THE G-D OF ISRAEL, BECAUSE WHEN HE TALKS HE SHOWS THAT HE HAS NO G-D, THAT G-D IS NOT PRESENT IN THE SYNAGOGUE, THAT HE DOESN'T FEAR G-D...

(ZOHAR TERUMA 131)

OUR SAGES TEACH US: EACH DAY HASHEM WAGES WAR WITH THE SATAN, WHO INSTIGATES AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. HASHEM STATES UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT THE SONS OF ISRAEL ARE BETTER THAN ALL THE NATIONS. HOWEVER, WHEN THE SATAN INDICATES THAT THE ISRAELITES CONVERSE FRIVOLOUSLY IN THE SYNAGOGUES, THEN THE HOLY ONE BLESSED BE HE HAS, AS IT WERE, NO REPLY TO THE SATAN BECAUSE THE OTHER NATIONS STAND WITH AWE AND REVERENCE IN THEIR HOUSES OF WORSHIP. THUS, WHEN IT IS WRITTEN: "HASHEM WILL FIGHT (THE SATAN) FOR YOU, AND YOU BE



SILENT" IT MEANS: YOU MUST NOT SPEAK NOR DISCUSS ANY MUNDANE MATTERS IN YOUR SYNAGOGUES, SINCE IT MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE TO FIGHT FOR YOU AGAINST THE SATAN. IF YOU WILL BE SILENT IN SHUL, HASHEM WILL FIGHT FOR YOU AND YOU WILL EMERGE VICTORIOUS (YALKUT HA URIM)

HE WHO CONVERSES ON MUNDANE MATTERS IN THE SYNAGOGUE, WOE TO HIM BECAUSE HE SHOWS SEPARATION (FROM HASHEM), WOE TO HIM BECAUSE HE DAMAGES AND DIMINISHES THE FAITH, WOE TO HIM BECAUSE HE HAS NO PORTION IN THE G-D OF ISRAEL, BECAUSE WHEN HE TALKS HE SHOWS THAT HE HAS NO G-D, THAT G-D IS NOT PRESENT IN THE SYNAGOGUE, THAT HE DOESN'T FEAR G-D...

(ZOHAR TERUMA 131)

THEREFORE EVERY PERSON WHO IS FEARFUL OF AND LISTENS TO THE WORD OF HASHEM, WILL PUT IN FRONT OF HIS EYES AND HIS HEART THIS, MAINLY, NOT TO TALK ANY WORLDLY THINGS IN THE SYNAGOGUE NOR IN THE BEIT MIDRASH, AND THESE PLACES WILL BE FOR HIM ONLY FOR TORAH AND TEFILLAH

(MISHNA BERURAH SIMAN 151)

THE CHATAM SOFER Z'L WRITES: THE HOLY ONE BLESSED BE HE IN HIS GREAT COMPASSION LEFT US A MIKDASH MEAT (SMALL MIKDASH): SYNAGOGUES AND BATE MIDRASHIM. AND IF WE BEHAVE IN THEM WITH SANCTITY AND RESPECT, THEN IN THE FUTURE, THEY WILL BE FIXED IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL (MEGGILA 29). AND THEY NOW POSSESS THE SANCTITY OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL, AND

THE PRAYERS ARE TAKEN TO THE GATES OF HEAVEN. BUT IF G-D FORBID, WE BEHAVE IN THEM WITH DISRESPECT AND WE TALK THINGS THAT ARE NOT RELATED TO TORAH, THEN THE BREATH OF THOSE EMPTY WORDS IS IMPURE, AND DRESSES ITSELF UP IN THE MINISTER (ANGEL) THAT CONTROLS OUTSIDE THE LAND OF ISRAEL, AND HE BECOMES THE OWNER OF THE SYNAGOGUE, G-D FORBID, AND HE RECEIVES THE PRAYERS AND INSERTS THEM IN THE FORCES OF EVIL (CHITZONIM), AND THIS IS LIKE AVODA ZARA (IDOLATRY) AND ALSO IT'S ON THE LEVEL OF: "THE ONE WHO LIVES OUTSIDE THE LAND OF ISRAEL RESEMBLES AS IF HE HAS NO G-D" (KETUBOT 110 B) (CHATAM SOFER, DERASHOT B, 309, 4)

IT IS WRITTEN IN ELIYAHU RABBA IN THE NAME OF THE KOL BO: WOE TO THE ONE WHO CONVERSES ON MUNDANE MATTERS IN THE SYNAGOGUE, BECAUSE WE HAVE SEEN MANY SYNAGOGUES DESTROYED BECAUSE OF THIS TRANSGRESSION  
(MISHNA BERURAH, SIMAN 151)

HE WHO TALKS WORLDLY THINGS IN THE SYNAGOGUE, IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR HIM NOT TO COME AT ALL BECAUSE HE IS A SINNER AND MAKES OTHER PEOPLE SIN  
(KAF HA CHAYIM, 151)

HE WHO SPEAKS DURING THE REPETITION OF THE AMIDAH, DURING KADDISH OR DURING THE READING OF THE TORAH, WE ARE OBLIGED TO SHOUT AT HIM "MURDERER" BECAUSE HE IS CAUSING HIS CHILDREN TO BECOME ORPHANS (HAGAN VE DERECH MOSHE, 9TH DAY)

IT IS A MITZVAH TO EMBARRASS SOMEONE WHO CONVERSES IN THE SYNAGOGUE, IF AFTER HE'S BEEN WARNED THREE TIMES, DOESN'T STOP TALKING  
(VAVE HA AMUDIM, AMUD HA AVODA, 10)

*“What should be a man's occupation in this world? He should become as a mute person” (Chullin 89a). One must seal his lips as tight as two millstones. And all the punishment of Kaf ha Kela (the hollow of the sling, a punishment for the soul after death) comes from the breath of idle words and for every idle word one must be thrown from one end of the world to the other. Now this is true concerning mere permitted speech.*

**IGGERET HA GRA**

## CHAPTER 6

### RABBENU YONAH OF GERONA ZTK'L

#### FROM THE SEFER SHAARE TESHUVAH – THE GATES OF REPENTANCE

#### THIRD GATE

#### THE FOUR CLASSES OF PEOPLE THAT WILL NOT BEHOLD THE SHECHINA

An explanation of the transgressions of the four classes

172 Our Sages of blessed memory have said (Sotah 42b): "Four classes do not behold the Divine Presence: the class of scoffers, the class of liars, the class of flatterers, and the class of slanderers [Speakers of LASHON HA RA]. The class of scoffers, as it is written, 'He draws away His hand from scoffers' (Hosea 7:5): the class of liars, as it is written, 'He that spreads falsehood shall not be established before my eyes' (Psalms 101: 7): the class of flatterers, as it is written, 'For a flatterer will not come before Him' (Job 13: 16): the class of slanderers, as it is written, 'For You are not a G-d that has pleasure in wickedness; evil shall not sojourn with You' (Psalms 5 : 5)" (Sotah 42a).

#### THE SUBJECT IS ARRANGED IN ORDER TO LET THE READER REALIZE THE MAGNITUDE OF THESE ABHORRENT DEEDS

173 We shall now enter into an analysis of their nature and characteristics, so that you may understand them in depth. We

shall divide them into their various parts and reveal the extent of the severity of the punishment for abhorrent deeds. Many advantages are to be gained through this arrangement. For it may be that you have not as yet acquired a sound understanding of these things, nor discerned well the gravity of the offenses of their various counterparts, nor recognized the force and severity of the punishment ascribable to each of them. Or it may be that you have recognized a part and not the whole.

**WE HAVE ARRANGED THEM  
ACCORDING TO THEIR ACTIONS IN A  
DESCENDING ORDER OF SEVERITY**

We have arranged the offenses in a descending order of severity. Through our words, you will find even the lesser of the offenses to be invested with terror and death, and you will know that they terminate in the paths of death. It may be that in the past your ears were not open, and these things were a straight path to you.

**FEAR OF THESE ACTS WILL ENTER  
YOUR THOUGHTS AND THE SPIRIT OF  
HEAVENLY FAVOR WILL  
DESCEND UPON YOU**

But now, when we reveal the bitterness inherent within them, fear of them will enter your thoughts. The proper understandings will inhabit the chambers of your spirit when you see that I bring forth trustworthy witnesses to testify wisdom, Scripture, the words of the Sages and their wonderful

cryptic statements. They will stand as a testimony and a sign. Through them you will discern the truth, and a spirit of Heavenly favor will descend upon you. You will remove evil traits from within you, and goodly things will brace your heart.

## **THE CLASS OF SCOFFERS [LETZIM] AND THEIR FIVE CATEGORIES**

### **THE FIRST: THOSE WHO INSULT OTHERS BECAUSE OF THEIR PRIDE AND ARROGANCE**

174 The first category consists of those scoffers who insult others, as it is said, "You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son" (Psalms 50: 20). And he is called a scoffer, as it is said, "A proud and haughty man, scoffer is his name, even he that deals in overbearing pride" (Proverbs 21:24). That is, these two evil traits, presumption and pride, meet and conjoin in the scoffer; for without deriving any benefit thereby, he engenders great damage to his neighbors, which results in their being scorned by others. This is the essence of presumption, more so than theft and plunder, the object of which is to pin wealth. And he is also proud.

### **THE HUMBLE PERSON KNOWS HIS SHORTCOMINGS AND DOESN'T SCOFF AT OTHERS**

For when the lowly and humble person recognizes his shortcomings and deficiencies, he does not scoff at others. Our Sages of blessed memory have said, "In time to come, all of the animals will gather before the snake and say to it, 'A lion claws and eats; a wolf tears and eats; but you, what advantage do

you have?' And it will answer them, 'And what advantage does the slanderer have?' As it is said, 'If the serpent bite before it is charmed, then the man of speech has no advantage' (Ecclesiastes 10:11)" (Taanit 8a). This category is also included among those of the class of slanderers.

**THE SECOND CATEGORY: THOSE WHO LOOK  
DOWN UPON OTHERS WHO HAVE  
NO MATERIAL SUCCESS**

175 The second category consists of those who mock others, scorning them in their hearts because of the latter's falling short in the attainment of virtues, temporal successes, honor, and authority, or spurning them because of their poverty and destitution. It is pride which leads to this trait, or an abundance of tranquility and pleasure, as it is said, "Our soul is full sated with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud oppressors" (Psalms 123: 4). And sometimes the scoffer will mock the holy ones and the prophets, as it is said, "Everyone mocks me" (Jeremiah 20: 7). And Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "He that despises his neighbor sins" (Proverbs 14: 21). It is also said, "He that despises his neighbor lacks understanding" (ibid. 11: 12), and, "Whoso mocks the poor blasphemes his Maker; and he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished" (ibid. 17:5). That is, one who mocks the poor shows himself to regard successes as being in the power of man, and their attainment within the province of his wisdom, as it is said, "And you say in your heart: 'My power and the might of my hand bath gotten me this wealth'" (Deuteronomy 8: 17), and, "For he has said: 'By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for

I am prudent' " (Isaiah 10 : 13). Because of this he mocks the poor, telling himself that their failure to achieve wealth is attributable to inferior understanding and lack of exertion. In so thinking he blasphemes the Maker of the poor and the rich; for everything proceeds from the Blessed One, as it is said, "The rich and the poor meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all" (Proverbs 22: 2).

#### **THE ONE WHO IS GLAD AT THE CALAMITY OF OTHERS SHALL NOT GO UNPUNISHED**

And concerning one who is glad at calamity, it is said, "He . . . shall not be unpunished." Though he has committed no injury in deed or in word, he shall not go unpunished. But the evil of one who is glad at calamity does not compare to the evil of one who mocks the poor. And because levity results from pride, which is the converse of humility, Solomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "If the scoffers he will scoff, and to the humble He will give grace" (ibid. 3: 34). "If the scoffers" -Surely, the scoffers," who mock others, G-d will mock, as it is said, "He that sits in Heaven laughs; the Lord has them in derision" (Psalms 2: 4). The "If" construction here is for the purpose of adding strength to the statement, as in, "But if [i.e. surely] Kain shall be wasted" (Numbers 24:22), and, "For if [i.e. surely] there is a future" (Proverbs 23: 18).

#### **THE THIRD CATEGORY: THEY SCOFF AT EVERYTHING FOR THEY THINK THEY ARE WISER THAN EVERYBODY ELSE**

176 The third category consists of those who constantly scoff at things and at actions, without intending to shame those to



whom they pertain, but repelling things which should not be repelled, and keeping back the benefits of actions from which benefits may be anticipated. Concerning this it is said, "Whoso despises a thing shall suffer thereby" (Proverbs 13: 13). And our Sages said, "Do not despise any man, and do not take exception to any thing, for there is no man that does not have his hour, and there is no thing that does not have its place" (Avot 4:3). This scoffer is brought to his evil trait through being wise in his own eyes. And there are times when this trait can bring one to heresy, to scoff at the mitzvot, as it is said, "The proud have had me greatly in derision; yet have I not turned aside from Your Law" (Psalms 119:51).

**THEY DO NOT ACCEPT REPROOF FOR THEY  
DON'T ACCEPT OTHER PEOPLE'S JUDGMENT**

This third category is the class which does not accept reproof, as it is said, "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you" (Proverbs 9: 8), and, "He that corrects a scorner gets to himself shame" (ibid. 7), and, "When you smite a scorner, the simple will become prudent" (ibid. 19:25). What disposes this class not to heed reproof is that the trait which brings one into this category is deeming oneself wise, a trait which impresses itself so strongly upon one that he comes to scoff at the judgment of others. This is the trait for which there is no hope, as it said, "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope of a fool than of him" (ibid. 26: 12).

**THE FOURTH CATEGORY: IDLE GOSSIPERS  
WHO SPEAK TOO MUCH AND BRING SIN**

177 The fourth category consists of those who devote themselves to idle gossip and vain pursuits, such as the street

idlers. There are two evils in this thing. The first is that all who speak overmuch bring about sin, and the second is that one thereby neglects to learn Torah; and in this thing lie the ways of death. For how can one fail to remember or to realize that in the time which he wasted he could have attained the pleasure of acquiring eternal life, by having devoted the available time, in which he is free of his work and occupations, to Torah? This arises only from one's heart making light of mitzvot and of the reward of the World to Come.

#### **AND THEY NEGLECT THE STUDY OF TORAH**

Aside from causing much good to go lost, he will bear his transgression, for the guilt of neglect of Torah at a time when it is possible for one to engage in it is an utterly consuming fire, as our Sages have said, "'Because he has despised the word of the Lord' (Numbers 15: 31) applies to one for whom it is possible to engage in Torah study, but does not do so" (Sanhedrin 99a) as we have explained before. And our Sages of blessed memory have said, "If one goes to a place where men have assembled to jest, he is considered to have gone to a seat of scoffers." In this connection it is said, "And he did not sit in the seat of scoffers" (Psalms 1: 1), after which it is written, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord" (ibid. 2), from which we learn that sitting in the seat of scoffers leads to neglect of Torah (Avodah Zarah 18b). One who has not set his heart to occupation with Torah in his free hours must commune with himself so that he not go lost, and must seclude himself in them to consider his end, to understand his latter end, to search out his ways, to acquire spiritual virtues and to draw nearer to the Blessed One.

**THE FIFTH: THOSE WHO SCOFF WITHOUT HATE BUT NEVERTHELESS BRING MUCH SIN AND TAKE THE YOKE OF HEAVEN OFF THEM**

The fifth category consists of those who scoff with their lips at deeds and words, not despising them in their heart, but in the manner of revelers, not intending ill and not confirmed in their levity. This sometimes results from the drinking of wine, and from drunkenness, as it is said, "Wine is a scoffer and strong drink a shouter, and all who go astray in it will not be wise" (Proverbs 20 : 1). That is, the man of wine is a scoffer, and the man of strong drink a shouter; "all who go astray in it will not be wise; as in "And I am prayer" (Psalms 109: 4) - a man of prayer. The intent is that the drinking of wine leads to three evils: first, to cause one to be a scoffer; second, to cause one to shout and to talk much (and our Sages of blessed memory have said, "All who talk overmuch bring sin" Avot 1.17), and "A fool's voice is in a multitude of words" [Ecclesiastes 5 : 21]; and third, "all who go astray in it will not be wise." Know that the practice of levity is not confirmed in a man's spirit until he divests himself of the yoke of Heaven. He will therefore be punished by being made to bear the yoke of afflictions, measure for measure, as it is said, "Now therefore be ye not scoffers, lest your bands be made strong" (Isaiah 28 : 22). And our Sages of blessed memory have said, "Afflictions come to all those who scoff, as it is said, 'lest your bands be made strong'" (Avodah Zarah 18b). The Sages were wont to exhort their disciples against engaging in levity even fortuitously and in passing. They felt constrained to exhort against this variety of levity, for many stumble therein.

## **THE CLASS OF LIARS [SHEKARIM] AND THEIR NINE CATEGORIES**

### **THE FIRST CATEGORY: MEN WHO HAVE ABANDONED THE TORAH AND WHO BRING EVIL AND DESTRUCTION**

178 The first category is that of the man of deceit, who has abandoned Torah and who works evil and destruction with his words, such as one who utters a false denial in respect to his neighbor's pledge or deposit, or in respect to the wages of a laborer, as it is said: ". . . neither shall ye deal falsely, nor lie one to the other" (Leviticus 19:11). Similarly, one who bears false witness against his neighbor. It is said, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20: 13). Included in this category is guile and deceit in business and in partnership, as it is said, "You shall not wrong one another" (Leviticus 25: 14), and, "Oppression and guile depart not from her broad place" (Psalms 55: 12). The practitioner thereof is called "a man of iniquity" and "a base person"; and this class is one of the most reprehensible among the classes of the wicked, as mentioned in the Gates of the fear of sin. The characteristics of this man of iniquity are winking of the eyes and pointing with the fingers, as it is said. "A base person, a man of iniquity, is he that walks with a forward mouth; that winks with his eyes, that scraps with his feet, that points with his fingers" (Proverbs 6: 12-13).

**THE SECOND CATEGORY:  
THEY LIE AND DECEIVE THEIR NEIGHBORS  
IN ORDER TO DO THEIR EVIL WORKS  
AFTERWARDS**

179. The second category consists of those who lie in such a manner that the lie itself involves no injury or loss to one's neighbor, but where the probability exists that the lie may be employed towards one's injury and harm, such as in the case of one who gives his neighbor the false impression that he is his affectionate and faithful friend, for the purpose of securing his trust and putting him off guard so that he can spring evil upon him, as it is said, "One speaks peacefully to his neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart, he lays wait for him" (Jeremiah 9: 7), after which it is said, " `Shall I not punish them for these things,' says the Lord? `Shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this?'" (ibid. 8). The punishment attaching to these two categories is ascribable to two factors, the falsehood itself, and the harm bound up with it; for the falsehood itself, aside from its harmful aspect, is an abomination to the Lord, as it is said, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 12: 22). and, "There are six things which the Lord hates, and, seven which are an abomination unto Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that devises wicked thoughts..." (ibid. 6: 16-18), and, `And the forward mouth do I hate" (ibid. 8: 13), and "How much less one that is abominable and impure, man who drinks iniquity like water" (Job 15: 16). Falsehood is abominable even to flesh and blood.

**THE THIRD CATEGORY: THEY WITHHOLD  
GOOD THROUGH DECEIT, THEY ARE  
LIKE IDOL WORSHIPPERS**

180 The third category consists of those who through subtlety and deceit attempt to keep some good from their neighbor and to direct it to themselves - not to steal or to seize from their neighbor what is his, but to eye his prospective good and prey upon it, to appropriate it for themselves through their lying words, or, by means of their lies, to extract a gift from him. The punishment is essentially for lying; but the punishment for lying is greater when the lie results in a loss for another, although the punishment, in essence, is not referable to the loss, for in such an instance, one has not been caused to lose something which he has already acquired - as our Sages of blessed memory have said, "All who employ deception are akin to idol worshippers" (Sanhedrin 92a), as it is said, "My father peradventure will feel me and I shall seem to him as a deceiver" (Genesis 26: 12). And in connection with idol-worship it is said, "They are vanity, a work of deception, in the time of their visitation they shall perish" (Jeremiah 10: 15). Our Sages of blessed memory, in making the comparison to idol-worship, have carried the analogy to its outermost limit because of idolatry's being supported by falsehood and assisted by deceit.

**THE FOURTH CATEGORY: THEY DISTORT  
THROUGH LIES THINGS THEY HAVE HEARD**

181. The fourth category consists of those who lie in recounting things they have heard, deliberately distorting some of them. Such as these derive no benefit from their lies nor injure others

thereby, but pursue this pattern because they love falsehood rather than speaking righteousness. Occasionally they invent all of what they say. The punishment of such men is less severe in one respect, in that no one sustains a loss through their lying and rashness; but their punishment is very great in respect of their audacity and love of falsehood, and their transgression is intensified because of their loving it in spite of its not serving any practical purpose. Solomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "A false witness that breaths out lies" (Proverbs 6: 19). That is, if you see a man that breaths lies in conversing and in relating things, then know that this trait will lead him to testify falsely against his brother and to bear perverted witness against him, as a result of his love of falsehood.

#### **SOME LYING IS PERMITTED FOR THE SAKE OF MITZVOT AND FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE**

This variety of lying was permitted for the sake of the fulfillment of mitzvot and in the pursuit of good and peace. Our Sages said that it is permissible to praise the bride in the presence of the groom and to say that she is beautiful and graceful, even though she is not (Kethubot 17a). And they said, "It is permissible to dissemble in the interests of good will, as it is said, 'Your father did command before he died, saying: "Forgive, I pray you now, the transgression of your brethren, and their sin, for that they did unto you evil"' (Genesis 50: 16-17)" (Yevamot 65b).

#### **IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE A GOOD LISTENER**

There are some who unwittingly distort part of what they hear because they fail to listen with attentive discrimination. This,

too, is an evil trait. Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "But the man that listens shall speak forever" (Proverbs 21 : 28). That is, the man that is attentive in hearing, and in listening for the essence of what is spoken into his ears, so that he can repeat it correctly, and in whose mouth a deceiving tongue is not found, "will speak forever," for people will love to listen to his words, and they will never say to him, "Why do you keep on talking?"

#### **THE FIFTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO SAY ONE THING AND THINK ANOTHER**

182. The fifth category consists of those who tell their neighbor that they will confer some benefit or gift upon him, and while yet speaking with him, tell themselves that they will not do so. It is said, "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile" (Psalms 34: 14), concerning which our Sages of blessed memory said, "We are hereby taught not to speak one thing with our mouth and another with our heart" (Bava Metzia 49a). And they said further that recanting one's word also constitutes a breach of faith. What one speaks with his mouth must be confirmed in his mind (Yerushalmi Bava Metzia 4 : 2).

#### **THE SIXTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO BREAK THEIR PLEDGE OF HELPING OTHERS**

183. The sixth category consists of those who assure their neighbor of some benefit and then falsify their words and nullify them. After one has told another that he will benefit him, employing terms of assurance, and gaining the other's trust, he must not break his pledge, for this is the way of



falsehood, He is as one that breaks a covenant, as it is said, "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth" (Zephaniah 3: 13).

**EVEN IF ONE PROMISED A SMALL GIFT  
ONE MUST FULFILL HIS PROMISE**

The same applies to one who told his neighbor that he would give him a small gift, although no terms of assurance were used, our Sages saying that this constitutes a breach of faith, because one who is so told relies on the other and trusts him, feeling that since the gift is a small one, he will certainly receive it. And if the one who is thus told is a poor man, although the gift pledged is a large one, going back upon the pledge constitutes a great evil because a vow has been made, and it is said, "He shall not break his word" (Numbers 30: 3). Similarly, one who plumes himself in public on the gift he will give to another, as it were, praising himself for his magnanimity, in effect has made a promise; and it is not right that he go back on his words once he has honored and praised himself through them, as it is written, "As vapors and wind without rain, so is he that boasts himself of a false gift" (Proverbs 25: 14). That is, just as men are made sad when the signs of rain appear, but no rain follows, so is it in respect to one who praises himself for a false gift; for his praising himself in this manner is a sign towards the fulfillment of his words. Therefore, he who was assured of the gift will be made sad, for his hope will have been disappointed.

**THE SEVENTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO SAY  
THEY DID GOOD WHEN IN FACT  
THEY DID NOT**

184. The seventh category consists of those who deceive their neighbor by telling him that they have done him a favor or spoken well of him, when, in reality, they have not done so. Our Sages of blessed memory have said, "It is forbidden to delude others, even gentiles" (Chullin 94a). The Sages of Israel account this sin as more severe than that of robbing a gentile because lying lips are extremely guilt-ridden. We have been commanded to circumscribe ourselves in respect to the truth, because it is one of the foundations of the soul.

**THE EIGHTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO TAKE  
PRIDE ON QUALITIES THEY DO NOT POSSESS**

185. The eighth category consists of those who pride themselves on qualities they do not possess. Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "Overbearing speech becomes not a churl; much less do lying lips a prince" (Proverbs 17: 7). That is, the churl has no cause to be proud and elevate himself because of the noble qualities of his ancestors - it being stated in the preceding verse, "And the glory of children are their fathers." How much more so, then, must a philanthropist refrain from honoring himself through falsehood, by saying, "Thus have I done, and this much have I lavished, and that much have I given" - when he has not done so. Such behavior is shameful in anyone, and especially in a philanthropist. And he cheapens the charity which he has already performed by praising himself for what

he has not done, thus supplying testimony that his motive in all of his previous acts of charity was the acquisition of prestige and praise. Our Sages of blessed memory have said that if one is honored in a manner merited by those who have a knowledge of two tractates of the Talmud, when he has a knowledge of only one, it is incumbent upon him to say, "I know only one" (Yerushalmi, end of Shviith). And it is certainly forbidden to glorify oneself falsely by saying, "We have heard many such things."

**THE NINTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO LIE  
WITHOUT HURTING ANYONE AND ONLY  
GAINS SATISFACTION FROM LYING**

186. The ninth category consists of those who do not lie in recounting what they have heard or in relating incidents, but who fabricate in accordance with their needs, without causing another to lose thereby. They gain a certain satisfaction in their lying, even though they do not profit monetarily in doing so. Our Sages have said that this, too, is forbidden (Yevamoth 63a), as it is said, "They have taught their tongue to speak lies" (Jeremiah 9: 4). Their punishment, however, is not so great as that of those who lie for no reason whatsoever, a class we have discussed in our analysis of the fourth category.

These are the categories of the class of liars. We have already introduced principles governing the conduct of a man of truth, these principles constituting foundations for the soul.

## **THE CLASS OF FLATTERERS [CHANEFIM] AND THEIR NINE CATEGORIES**

### **THE FIRST CATEGORY: THEY KNOW THEIR NEIGHBOR'S ACTIONS ARE WRONG AND YET THEY TELL HIM: "YOU HAVE DONE NO WRONG"**

187. The first category consists of those flatterers who recognize, see, or know of some wrong practice of their neighbors and of his abiding by deceit, or of one man's sinning against another through slander or through injurious words and who smooth over his offenses with an evil tongue, saying, "You have committed no wrong." Is a sin's lacking rebuke not enough for them--as it is said, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him" (Leviticus 19: 17) - that they sin even more by saying, "You have not sinned"? - as it is said, ". . . and they strengthen the hands of evildoers" (Jeremiah 23 : 14). This foolish flatterer is guilty of a grave transgression; for he is not jealous of truth, but breeds falsehood; he calls what is bad, good, and turns darkness to light. And he places a stumbling block before the sinner in two respects: first, the sinner does not regret his evil, and second, he repeats his indiscretion the next day, because the wicked flatterer praised him for having gratified his lust - this, aside from the flatterer's incurring punishment because of the damage sustained by the individual wronged by the sinner through the flatterer's justification of his sin, and aside from his being punished for speaking falsehood, as it is said, "You

destroy them that speak falsehood" (Psalms 5:7), and, "He that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the righteous, even they both are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17: 15). This applies even more so when the wrong that his wicked neighbor practices is known to others; for when the flatterer tells him in the presence of others, "You are pure and without offense," he thereby desecrates and demeans law and judgment.

**IT IS BETTER TO EXPOSE ONESELF TO  
DANGER THAN TO BE AMONG THOSE WHO  
FLATTER OTHERS**

188. A man must expose himself to danger rather than bear upon his soul a sin as grave as this. Our Sages told us that once Agrippas was reading the Torah and when he reached the verse, "You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother" (Deuteronomy 17: 15), his eyes streamed tears, at which those who were with him said, "You are our brother." At that moment the Jews brought down upon themselves the sentence of destruction, because they flattered Agrippas (Sotah 41a). How much more must one who sits in judgment keep himself from fearing mortal man, as it is said, "You shall not be afraid of any man" (Deuteronomy 1 : 17). This category is that of the wicked man who is counted among the two evil classes, falsehood and flattery having joined in him. There are categories among the class of flatterers in which the flatterer is utterly destroyed because of the transgression of flattery itself, as will be explained.

**THE SECOND CATEGORY: THOSE WHO  
FLATTER THE EVILDOER EVEN THOUGH  
THEY DO NOT JUSTIFY HIS ACTIONS**

189. The second category consists of those who flatter the evildoer before others, whether or not in his presence, even though they do not justify his crime or give a false account of him, but simply say that he is a good man. Concerning this it is said, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked" (Proverbs 28: 4). For if one had not forsaken the Torah, he would not praise the transgressor of its words and the violator of its mitzvot. And though one praise the evildoer only for the good which he does, indeed, possess, and speak well of him to others to do justice to his good qualities, this, too, is a grievous ill; for his mentioning the good and not the evil, and concealing his offenses, will cause the hearers to regard him as a righteous man and to accord him honor, thus strengthening his hand. We have already mentioned the pitfalls and the corruption inherent in the honoring of the wicked.

**IT IS NOT CORRECT TO MENTION SOMEONE'S  
RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT MENTIONING  
HIS WICKEDNESS**

Therefore, it is not correct to mention their righteousness without mentioning their wickedness and folly, as it is said, "But the name of the wicked shall rot" (ibid. 10: 7), and, "I will declare your righteousness; your works also-they shall not profit you" (Isaiah 57: 12). That is, your good deeds will not avail you to rescue you from your wickedness when I arise to judge you, when the multitude of your offenses and deceptions

are weighed against them; for your transgressions outweigh them. This accords with the statement of our Sages that one whose transgressions are greater than his merits is written down and immediately consigned to death (Rosh Hashanah 16b). Evildoers are recognized through their conversation and conduct, as we have mentioned in the Gates of the fear of sin.

### **THE RIGHTEOUS SHOULD DESPISE THE WICKED**

190. The righteous will despise the wicked, as it is said, "An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous" (Proverbs 29: 27). And if one is not in the class of the righteous, if he will not despise or curse him, he will, likewise, not bless him.

### **THE SIMPLE ONES PRAISE THE WICKED IN THEIR SIMPLEMINDEDNESS**

191. One may come to praise the wicked through simplemindedness. For the simpleton says that it is good to praise, whether the praise be deserved or not. And, unknowingly, he praises the dead; for our Sages have said that the wicked are considered dead in their lifetime (Berachot 18b). They are accounted shades in their lifetime, and are called "dead," as it is said, "But the dead know not any thing" (Ecclesiastes 9: 5). And this unintentional sin is accounted intentional; for the master will not love that servant who loves his foes and befriends those who are distant from him. Reason should render this evident. And it is said, "But as for the fools, they carry away shame" (Proverbs 3: 35). This has been previously explained.

**THE THIRD CATEGORY: THEY PRAISE THE  
WICKED IN HIS FACE BUT ARE CAREFUL  
ENOUGH NOT TO PRAISE HIM  
IN FRONT OF OTHERS**

192. The third category consists of those who praise the evildoer to his face, but who are guided by wisdom to the extent that they do not praise him in the presence of others, lest their doing so proves to be a stumbling-block. The transgression of these flatterers, too, is a great one; for because of their soft handedness to the evildoer, he will not turn from his evil path; and his transgressions will cause him no anxiety, for he will be righteous in his eyes. If one is not in the class of the righteous, and he is flattered, he will say in his heart, "Indeed, I knew it to be so," as it is said, "With his mouth, the flatterer destroys his neighbor; but through knowledge the righteous is delivered" (Proverbs 11:9). That is, the flatterer destroys his neighbor with his mouth if he praises him and the latter believes his words, hardens his spirit, comes to esteem himself, and fails to comprehend because of his inflated spirit. And once he has been provided with this pitfall, his heart will swell and he will fall into the snares of his pride, the end being that this flatterer will have destroyed him with his honeyed words.

**CHOOSE FRIENDS WHO REPROVE YOU  
AND NOT THOSE WHO PRAISE YOU**

"But through knowledge the righteous is delivered." The righteous rescue themselves through their knowledge, from the injuries that the flatterers can inflict, for the praise that they receive will not cause their hearts to swell, as our Sages said,



"Even if all the world say about you, 'You are righteous,' be as an evildoer in your eyes" (Niddah 30b), and, "If you have friends, some who praise you, and some who reprove you, love those who reprove you and hate those who praise you, for the former bring you to eternal life, whereas the latter, by their praise, cause you to rejoice in your evil" (Avot of R. Nathan 29). The verse may also be interpreted, "But with knowledge the righteous deliver" - i.e. their friends; for they do not flatter them, but reprove them, and teach them the right way when they find them "wandering in the waste, where there is no way." It is said, "And a smooth mouth causes stumbling" (Proverbs 26: 28). A smooth mouth is here likened to a slippery road. Just as a person falls and stumbles in walking upon a slippery road, as it is said, "Let them be as chaff before the wind, the angel of the Lord thrusting them. Let their way be dark and slippery" (Psalms 35: 5-6), so is a person made to fall and stumble by a smooth mouth, that is, a flattering mouth.

### SMOOTH LIPS DESTROY ONE'S NEIGHBOR

In connection with what we have been saying, David, may Peace be upon him, said, "May the Lord cut off all smooth lips, the tongue that speaks proud things" (Psalms. 12:4). He has here cursed smooth lips, in that they destroy one's neighbor, and hard speech, the opposite of smooth speech-in other words, slander. There are those among the flatterers who intentionally flatter powerful men in order to be honored and elevated by them. Our Sages have said that the end of all those who flatter their neighbor for honor is to depart from him in shame (Avot of R. Nathan 29).

**THE FOURTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO NOT  
ONLY DO NOT REPROVE THE EVILDOERS  
BUT ALSO BEFRIEND THEM**

193. The fourth category consists of those who befriend the evildoer, those for whom it is not enough not to reprove him through verbal castigation and to set him at a distance, but who draw him near as a friend. It is said, "Because You have joined yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has made a breach in your works" (II Chronicles 20 : 37). The righteous utterly despise the wicked, as it is said, "In whose eyes a vile person is despised" (Psalms 15: 4). And our Sages of blessed memory said, "Not in vain did the starling go to the raven, but because it is of a kind with it" (Bava Kama 92b) and, "Each bird will dwell with its kind, and a man, with one who is like him" (ibid.), and, "It is forbidden to gaze at the likeness of an evildoer, as it is said, 'Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward you, nor see you' (II Kings 3: 14)" (Megillah 28a), and, "All those who gaze upon the likeness of an evildoer, their eyes become dim upon their growing old, as it is said, 'And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, his eyes became dim, so that he could not see' (Genesis 27: 1)" (Megillah 28a). This because of his having gazed upon the form of Esav, even though he was not aware of Esav's misdeeds, because of his concealing them, as it is said, "And their works are in the dark" (Isaiah 29: 15). We have already given a detailed explanation of the many paths of death found in conjunction with befriending of evildoers.

**THE FIFTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO  
FLATTER LEADERS FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT**

194. The fifth category consists of those whose words are trusted by others, and upon whose words all who hear them rely - who form the intention of elevating one among the people or one of their close relatives, out of affection for him, and who say about him that he is a wise man, when he is actually not wise, so that he becomes a hindrance and a stumbling-block; for his directions will be relied upon, and he will decide all disputes, pervert judgment, and produce chaos.

**YOU CAN NOT SAY THAT SOMEONE IS  
TRUSTWORTHY IF YOU ARE NOT SURE HE IS**

The same applies to their saying about a person that he is trustworthy when they do not know whether he is or is not trustworthy, so that those who hear them might appoint him over their household, and entrust to him all that they possess, only to have him deny everything and say, "I never saw you." And our Sages have said that if one appoints an unqualified person to be a judge, it is as if he planted an ashera [a tree consecrated to idol-worship], and if a Torah scholar is found in that place it is as if he has planted it next to the altar. (Sanhedrin 7b). In former days, one who would establish as an authority one who was not fit to render decisions was characterized by the verse "Woe unto him that says to the wood: 'Awake!' to the dumb stone: 'Arise!' Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it" (Habakkuk 2: 19). And the Holy One Blessed be He eventually exacts payment from those

who establish them, as it is said, "But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him" (ibid. 20).

**THE SIXTH CATEGORY: THE ONES WHO ARE  
IN A POSITION TO PROTEST BUT DO NOT**

195. The sixth category consists of those who are in a position to protest, but do not do so, in whose mouths there is no rebuke; who do not sharpen their eyes against evil deeds, nor pay heed to them, and who do not reprove others, in spite of our having been commanded to remove the evil from our people's midst, as it is said, "So shall you put away the evil from the midst of you" (Deuteronomy 13: 6). Our Sages of blessed memory have said, "All those who are in a position to reprove the members of their household, and do not do so are held accountable for the sins of the members of their household; those who are in a position to reprove the people of their city, and do not do so, are held accountable for the sins of the people of their city; and those who are in a position to reprove all men, and do not do so, are held accountable for the sins of all men" (Shabbat 54b). And it is said, "And they shall stumble one upon the other" (Leviticus 26: 37), which our Sages of blessed memory interpreted as "one, for the transgression of another," and in conjunction with which they said that all Israel is responsible one for the other (Sanhedrin 27b).

**THE SEVENTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO  
DON'T REBUKE FOR FEAR PEOPLE WILL  
NOT LISTEN TO THEM**

196. The seventh category consists of those who see the people of their place to be stiff-necked, but who say in their hearts,

"Perhaps they will not listen if I tell them the truth and fill my mouth with rebuke." And so he will hold his tongue and bear his transgression because of not having attempted to reprove and to give warning. Perhaps if he had bestirred their spirits, they would have awakened from the sleep of their foolishness and their error would not have remained with them. Our Sages of blessed memory have said in connection with the verse, "And set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry. . ." (Ezekiel 9: 4) - "The attribute of justice said, 'Although these men are perfectly righteous and have fulfilled the Torah, they should have protested and did not.' The Holy One Blessed be He said, 'It is perfectly known to me that if they had protested, their words would not have been accepted.' The attribute of justice answered, 'Lord of the World, though perfectly known to You, they did not know whether the people would pay heed to them or not,' after which the Blessed One commanded, 'And begin at my sanctuary' (ibid. 6) referring to the righteous holy ones, who were punished for not having protested" (Shabbat 55a). And it is said, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him" (Leviticus 19: 17).

**IF IT IS KNOWN THAT SOMEONE WILL NOT  
LISTEN TO REBUKE THEN IT IS BETTER  
NOT TO REBUKE HIM**

But if it is evident to all, and known, and tested and confirmed that the sinner hates instruction and will not listen to the voice of his teachers or give ear to those who would instruct him, about such a one it is said, "Reprove not a scorner lest he hate you" (Proverbs 9: 8). And our Sages have said, "Just as it is a

mitzvah to say what will be heeded, so is it a mitzvah not to say what will not be heeded" (Yevamot 65b), and, "It is better that they sin unintentionally than that they sin intentionally" (Betzah 30a).

**THE EIGHTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO  
LISTEN AND SIT WITH SLANDERERS WHO  
BELITTLE THE TORAH AND THE MITZVOT  
AND SAY NOTHING TO THEM**

197. The eighth category consists of those who hear the words of slanderers, or who hear every mouth speaking foulness, or who sit in the midst of scoffers who shame Torah and mitzvot, and (knowing them to be "defiers and despisers" who will not heed their words of reproof) hold their tongues. These, too, will be punished for not answering the fools according to their foolishness and so possibly coming to be regarded as the latter and as acquiescing in their words, especially in that one is duty-bound to answer and rebuke them to magnify Torah and mitzvot, which they have shamed and scoffed at, and to be jealous of the honor of the clean and righteous, whom they have spoken against.

**IT IS INCUMBENT UPON MEN TO LEAVE  
THE COMPANY OF THE WICKED**

198. This is one of the reasons for which it is incumbent upon a man to leave the company of the wicked; for he will be punished in hearing their evil words and refraining from answering them. This is explained in the words of Salomon, as it is said, "Be not envious of evil men; neither desire to be with them. For their heart studies destruction, and their lips talk of

mischief" (Proverbs 24: 1-2), the underlying idea being that you will bear a transgression in their sinning, by constantly hearing their evil words and remaining silent.

**THE NINTH CATEGORY: THOSE WHO GIVE HONOR TO THE WICKED OUR OF COURTESY**

199. The ninth category consists of those who give honor to the wicked by way of courtesy. They do not speak well of the wicked man, and do not honor him in such a way as to lead others to believe that they do so because they deem him worthy; for they will apportion honor to him only in the manner that men honor the rich, by way of dignified regard, and in expectation of benefit, because their ways have prospered and not because of their intrinsic worth. But herein, too, lies sin and wrongdoing; for though it is permitted to honor the rich, it is not so with the wicked, as it is said, "And look upon every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place" (Job 40: 11-12).

**THE ONLY REASON TO HONOR THE WICKED IS FOR FEAR THEY WILL CAUSE HARM**

The only reason for which it is permitted to honor the wicked is the fear of their causing injury or loss when their hand is strong and the times favor their audacity so that it is not within our hands to humble them, nor within our power to move them from their place. It is, therefore, permitted to honor them, as people honor those whose hands are high - out of fear and dread - by rising for them and according them dignity, and in similar ways; but it is forbidden to praise them or to speak well

of them to others. As our Sages of blessed memory have said, "It is permitted to flatter the wicked in this world" (Sotah 41b).

*This is one of the reasons for which it is incumbent upon a man to leave the company of the wicked; for he will be punished in hearing their evil words and refraining from answering them. This is explained in the words of Salomon, as it is said, "Be not envious of evil men; neither desire to be with them. For their heart studies destruction, and their lips talk of mischief" (Proverbs 24: 1-2), the underlying idea being that you will bear a transgression in their sinning, by constantly hearing their evil words and remaining silent.*

RABBENU YONAH



## CHAPTER 7

### RABBENU YONAH

#### THE CLASS OF SLANDERERS [LASHON HA RA]

##### THE ONE WHO SPEAKS LASHON HA RA DENIES G-D

200. Our Sages of blessed memory have said, "If one speaks slander it is as if he denies G-d, as it is said, 'Who have said: "Our tongue will we make mighty; our lips are with us: who is lord over us?"' (Psalms 12: 5)" (Arachin 15b). They account him as one who denies G-d, because he brings about great injury and much evil to his neighbors by demeaning them in the eyes of the populace or by detracting from them in other ways. And it is inconceivable that a man should prepare for his neighbor implements of destruction and injury more bitter than death, without gaining any benefit or monetary profit thereby, without the evil inclination's having ensnared his spirit and cast the yoke of heaven from off him and broken its bonds. As it is said, "For strangers are risen up against me, and violent men have sought after my soul; they have not set G-d before them" (Psalms 54: 5), which our Sages of blessed memory interpreted: " 'They have not set G-d before them' - their intention was that Saul bless them, as he said to them, 'Blessed be you of the Lord; for you have had compassion on me' (I Samuel 23:21)-'They have not set G-d before them,' for it is written in His Torah, 'Cursed be he that smite his neighbor in secret' (Deuteronomy 27 : 24)" (Midrash Tehilim

54). And it is said, "And there is no advantage to the slanderer" (Ecclesiastes 10: 11). And it is said about Doeg, "Your tongue devises destruction . . . You love evil more than good; falsehood rather than speaking righteousness. Selah" (Psalms 52:'4-5), which our Sages have interpreted: "What advantage or profit did you gain from your slander? You did not need money, for you are rich, as it is said about him, ". . . the chiefest of the herdsmen that belonged to Saul" (I Samuel 21: 81).

### **THEY LOVE EVIL MORE THAN GOOD AND FALSEHOOD MORE THAN RIGHTEOUSNESS**

It is only because of your loving evil more than good, and falsehood more than righteous speech, for you have cast off His yoke" (Midrash Tehilim 52). And it is said, "Men do not despise a thief if he steal . . ." (Proverbs 6 : 30), after which it is said, "He that commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding" (ibid. 32), which is to say that he is worse than a thief, who is impelled to alleviate his hunger. And our Sages of blessed memory have said that the slanderer is worse than both of these, for he commits a great sin without deriving any benefit, as it is said, "What shall be given unto you, and what shall be added unto you by a deceitful tongue?" (Psalms 120: 3). (Midrash Tehilim 120).

### **THE SLANDERER THINKS HE HAS AUTHORITY OVER HIS TONGUE TO SAY WHATEVER HE FEELS LIKE SAYING**

201. A second reason that the slanderer is accounted as one who has denied G-d is that he says in his heart that he has

authority over his lips (in that he does not perform an actual deed with them), and that he is ruler over his tongue; and he resolves that he need not suppress his lips from uttering what he feels inclined to utter, and that his limbs alone are not within his jurisdiction to sin with, as it is said, "Our lips are with us: who is lord over us?" (Psalms 12: 5). He will not say, "Where is the Lord, my Maker, the movements of all of whose creatures are under His control, none excepted, all duty-bound to perform His will?" He will not reason thus, but will maintain that the expression of the lips is within our jurisdiction. This is not true of the wicked who sin by means of other transgressions, who know that their forsaking the Blessed One is evil and bitter, but who are drawn after their lust and the intensification of their evil inclination, and are aggrieved because of it.

### LASHON HA RA OUTWEIGHS IDOLATRY ADULTERY AND MURDER

Our Sages have said, "Slander outweighs three transgressions: idol-worship, illicit relations, and the spilling of blood. Concerning idol-worship, it is said, 'Oh, this people have sinned a great sin' (Exodus 32 : 31); concerning illicit relations, it is said, 'How then can I do this great wickedness?' (Genesis 39 : 9); concerning the spilling of blood it is said, 'My transgression is too great to bear' (Genesis 4 : 13), whereas concerning slander it is said, 'May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things' (Psalms 12 : 4)" (Arachin 15b).

### **WE NEED TO ANALYZE THE STATEMENTS OF OUR SAGES IN DEPTH**

**202. We must explain how it can be that the transgression of slander is considered worse than the above three, when our Sages said about each of them, "Let a man allow himself to be killed rather than transgress them" (Sanhedrin 74a), and, "The sin of idol-worship is extremely severe, for if one accepts idol-worship it is as if he denies the whole Torah" (Chullin 5a), and that an apostate in relation to idol-worship is regarded as an apostate in relation to the entire Torah (Chullin 4b). If you lay your heart to the statements of our Sages of blessed memory, you will discover many origins and many aspects.**

### **THE SLANDERER CONSTANTLY REPEATS HIS TRANSGRESSIONS**

**203. First - the slanderer repeats his indiscretion. Ten times a day he will humiliate, and debase, and shame, and speak overmuch and smite in secret. And would that there were an end to his punishment-for the slanderer puts no end to his words -even a light transgression becoming very weighty upon the indiscretion's being repeated many times, as we have previously explained; how much more so a great sin and a grievous evil. And when our Sages of blessed memory said that slander outweighs three transgressions, they had in mind one who committed these transgressions when seized upon by his evil inclination, and not the exception, who committed them constantly.**

**REPENTANCE IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR  
THE SPEAKER OF LASHON HA RA**

204. Second - repentance is very difficult for the slanderer; for after having taught his tongue to speak falsehood and dispatched his lips to evil, from force of habit he no longer controls himself, and it is as if his tongue were the initiator of his thoughts, as it is said, "Your tongue devises destruction" (Psalms 52:4), and, "But the lips of a fool will swallow up himself" (Ecclesiastes 10: 12), and, "The mouth of a fool is mechitah to him" (Proverbs 18 :7), mechitah denoting fear and fright; the meaning being that the fool stands in fear and trepidation of falling prey to the fury of his tongue, just as he fears his enemy, for he exercises no control over his lips.

**THE SIN OF LASHON HA RA BECOMES LIGHT  
IN THE EYES OF THE TRANSGRESSOR**

205. Third - the sin of the slanderer is light in his eyes, for he says it is merely a matter of speech, and he pays no heed to the many injuries he causes. Therefore, he does not repent of his evil ways, and if he does, his repentance is not complete, for he does not recognize the greatness of his sin. For complete repentance towards cleansing oneself of a great offense comes about only through the burning of sorrow in one's soul, as the burning of fire.

**THE SLANDERER SMITES WITH HIS TONGUE  
BECAUSE OF HIS PRIDE AND HAUGHTINESS**

206. And Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "A proud and haughty man, scorner is his name; he wreaks with malicious wrath" (Ecclesiastes 21: 24). That is, the scorner,

whose aroused malice has caused him to smite with his tongue, with his pride and his haughtiness, with his wrath and his fury—do not say that he will smite through his tongue alone and not through deed, but know that "he wreaks with malicious wrath;" that is, if he will be unable to smite his foes with his tongue, but will be able to do so by deed, he will smite them with wrath and have no mercy. In this regard our Sages of blessed memory said in connection with the episode of Doeg, that when Saul commanded that the priests be killed, and his men would not kill them, he said to Doeg, "You smote with your tongue; you smite with the sword," as it is said, "Turn yourself and fall upon the priests" (I Samuel 22: 18). (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10: 2).

#### **THE SLANDERER DOESN'T EVEN KNOW TO WHOM HE MUST ASK FOR FORGIVENESS**

207. Fourth—if the slanderer repents, he must ask forgiveness of those who have suffered through the violence of his tongue; but he does not remember all of these, for he has inflicted many pains and aggrieved many souls. And there are many whom he does remember having sullied, but who are unaware of his having stirred up evil against them, and whom he will be ashamed to inform and apprise of his having dealt wrongfully with them. For he strikes without the blow's being known as his, as it is said, "What shall be given unto you, and what shall be added unto you by a deceitful tongue, sharp arrows of the mighty. . ." (Psalms 120: 3). Slander is compared to an arrow, for one who draws the bow often sends his arrows into a person without the latter's knowing who hit him.

**ONCE THE LASHON HA RA IS SAID LIKE AN  
ARROW IT CAN NOT BE STOPPED**

208. Slander is compared to an arrow in yet a different respect. For one who draws a sword, if his pity towards his intended victim is aroused by the latter's begging mercy of him, he can return his sword to its sheath; not so one who releases an arrow-he cannot call it back. So is it with the slanderer once the words have left his mouth, he cannot correct them. And sometimes he might speak of a stain in one's family, and injure all of the generations which follow, so that forgiveness will be rendered impossible for him. This is the reason for the statement of our Sages of blessed memory that one who speaks of a family taint can never gain repentance (Yerushalmi Bava Kama 8). One who lets loose his tongue will speak ill also of "the holy ones upon the earth," for over whom will his evil not continually pass? And our Sages of blessed memory have said that the flouter has no share in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90a).

**THE SPEAKERS OF LASHON HA RA END  
UP BLASPHEMING HASHEM**

209. Fifth - slander leads its practitioners to allow their mouths to speak perversely about the Blessed One, as it is said, "They have set their mouth against Heaven and their tongue walks through the earth" (Psalms 73: 9). Among all the transgressions there is none whose punishment equals that of the spouter of words. Our Sages of blessed memory have said that our forefathers were tested with ten trials, but their decree was scaled only because of slander, as it is said, "Surely as you have spoken in My ears, so will I do to you" (Numbers 14:28)

(Arachin 15a). And it is said, "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and swore, saying:" (Deuteronomy 1: 34), and, "You have wearied the Lord with your words" (Malachi 2: 17).

**AND TO THE EVILDOERS G-D SAYS: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING TALKING ABOUT MY LAWS?"**

And David, may Peace be upon him, said, "But unto the wicked, G-d says: `What have you to do to declare My statutes, and that you have taken My covenant in your mouth? . . . When you saw a thief, you had company with him . . . you have let loose your mouth for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother'" (Psalms 50: 16-18, 19). We are hereby taught that the Torah does not defend slanderers and confirmed thieves and adulterers, and that they are not fit to occupy themselves with Torah. And our Sages of blessed memory have said that because Doeg spoke slander, even his wisdom did not rescue him, and his Torah did not defend him (Sotah 21a). And the statement of our Sages of blessed memory, "A transgression extinguishes a mitzvah, but a transgression does not extinguish Torah" (ibid.). as it is said, "For a mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light" (Proverbs 6: 23), applies to one who commits a transgression by chance, and not to one who removes from himself the yoke of the exhortation against the transgression.

**NOT ONLY DO THEY LEAVE THE TORAH BUT ALSO THEIR MOUTHS ARE FULL WITH SIN**

210. Reflect upon the magnitude of the transgression of the slanderers. Is the great transgression of their lips' ceasing and



their mouths' abstaining from words of Torah not enough, that they pervert themselves so far as to speak slander? David, may Peace be upon him, said, "Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant does meditate in Your statutes" (Psalms 119: 23). That is to say, they do not engage in meditation upon Your statutes and they speak slander and they speak against me, while I meditate upon Your statutes. And our Sages of blessed memory have said that the cure by which one can rescue himself from slander is to engage in the study of Torah, as it is said, "The healing of the tongue is the Tree of Life" (Proverbs 15 : 4) (Arachin 15b). This is the intent of "I will keep a curb upon my mouth..." (Psalms 39 : 2), our Sages of blessed memory interpreting "curb" as one's occupation with Torah (Midrash Tehilim 39).

**ISRAEL IS BELOVED THROUGH ITS VOICE  
AND IS ALSO DESPISED THROUGH  
ITS VOICE, G-D FORBID**

Our Sages of blessed memory have said, "The Congregation of Israel, through its voice is beloved and through its voice is despised. Through its voice it is beloved, as it is said, 'Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet' (Canticles 2: 14); and through its voice it is despised, as it is said, 'She has uttered her voice against me; therefore, have I hated her' (Jeremiah 12: 8)" (Yalkut, Tehilim 721). And this is the meaning of "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they that love it shall eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18: 21). The interpretation of "and they that love it shall eat its fruit" is that the proper counsel for one who loves his tongue, that is, one who always wishes to speak, is to eat its fruits i.e. not to engage in idle

words, but in words of Torah, wisdom, and, instruction, in the fostering of peace between man and his neighbor, in the improvement of the populace, in the praising of good and reviling of evil, and in being jealous for the truth. For one can acquire unlimited merit for his soul through his tongue, life, as previously indicated, being in the power of the tongue.

## **THE SIX CATEGORIES OF SPEAKERS OF LASHON HA RA**

### **THE FIRST CATEGORY: THOSE WHO ASCRIBE IMPERFECTIONS ON OTHERS EVEN WHEN THEY DO NOT EXIST**

211. The first category consists of those who impute imperfections to others, where these imperfections do not exist, sometimes ascribing unsightliness to them in place of beauty. The heart of such a one will thrust to his mouth the traits of the two evil classes, one, the class of liars, and the other, the class of slanderers. The Torah has exhorted us not to accept slander because of the possibility of its being false and deceitful, as it is said, "You shall not accept a false report" (Exodus 23: 1). And Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "An evil-doer gives heed to wicked lips; and falsehood gives ear to a mischievous tongue" (Proverbs 17:4).

### **THE TWO CLASSES WHO ACCEPT SLANDER: ONE IS EVIL AND THE OTHER ONE IS A LIAR**

That is, two classes accept slander, the first being the class of the evil and malicious, in the sense of . . . for every one is unG-dly and an evildoer" (Isaiah 9: 16). A member of this class

suspects the innocent and loves to find some imperfection or guilt in his neighbor and some detraction against his honor, so that when he hears the latter's friend slandering him, the perversity of his heart inclines him to believe that the words are true. The second class is that of the liar. He, also, gives ear to and believes destructive speech; for since he does not withdraw himself from falsehood, he is not disturbed by the possibility of his assimilating deceit or accepting a false report, and for this reason he will be quick to accept slander. "Falsehood" in "falsehood gives ear" signifies the man of falsehood, the construction being similar to "Your habitation is in the midst of deceit" (Jeremiah 9: 5), "deceit" signifying "men of deceit," and, similarly, "And I am prayer" (Psalms 109: 4) - "a man of prayer."

**THE LISTENER SINS AS MUCH AS THE  
ONE WHO SPEAKS LASHON HA RA**

212. Know that when the hearer acknowledges the slander, his penalty and "the portion measured him" is one with the speaker of the slander; for others will say, "The hearers accepted it, and this is a sign that it is true and correct." Even the hearer's inclining his ear and giving the appearance of listening to and accepting the words of slander before others abets the evil, contributes to the shaming of his friend, and strengthens the hands of those who bring evil reports to others. Solomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "The north wind prevents the rain, and an angry countenance a backbiting tongue" (Proverbs 25:23). That is, just as the north wind scatters the clouds and prevents the rain, so does an angry countenance prevent slander. For if the teller sees that the

hearer's face is angry, he will stop the roaring flood of his words; but if he perceives the hearer to be listening to him, "he will drink iniquity like water" and will not keep his mouth from his lies. And it will be the same the next day, for he will repeat his indiscretion and will utter slander always, and his tongue will be caught up in the flow of his lies. "Prevents" [in "prevents the rain" above] is similar in signification to "He shall not break his word" (Numbers 30:3), and "Then calling was broken off" (Genesis 4: 26).

#### **HUMBLE PEOPLE HATE A LYING TONGUE**

213. Salomon said further, "Dakkuv will hate a lying tongue" (Proverbs 26:28). That is, the humble, and broken [Hebrew "dakkah"] and lowly man will hate a lying tongue. He will not want it and will not listen to it, for the humble man wishes his fellow men to be esteemed, and he is pained at their being shamed and abused. The letters "yod vav" of "dakkav" stand in place of the root letter, "alef," as in the case of the "yod vav" in "anav." Others interpret, "A lying tongue will hate its breakers" and reprovers, and will not again venture to slander others before them. We have been exhorted by Scripture- "You shall not accept a false report" (Exodus 23 : 1)-not to believe slanderous remarks in our hearts, not to give them credence in our thoughts so that the one against whom they are directed is lowered in our eyes.

#### **THE SECOND CATEGORY: THOSE WHO SPEAK LASHON HA RA BUT AT LEAST THEY DON'T MIX LIES IN THEIR STORY**

214. The second category consists of those who speak slander, but keep themselves from intruding falsehood into it. It is to

this category that our Sages referred when speaking of "the class of slanderers" - even though they are not of the class of liars. If one man reminds another in private of the evil deeds of his forbears he transgresses the Scriptural exhortation, "And you shall not wrong one another" (Leviticus 25: 17), the verse referring to wronging through words, as we have explained before. And it is said, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father" (Ezekiel 18: 20). One who shames another through the deeds of his forbears in the presence of others comes under the dictum of our Sages that one who shames his neighbor in public is among those who descend to Gehinnom and do not reascend (Bava Metzia 58b). And one who relates and makes known to others the abominations of another's forbears, not in the other's presence, in order to lower him and cheapen him in the eyes of his fellow min, comes under their dictum that the class of slanderers does not behold the Divine Presence. The same applies to one who relates the former transgressions of one who has repented.

**IF YOU SEE SOMEONE TRANSGRESSING IN  
PRIVATE AND YOU REVEAL THE SIN THEN  
YOUR SIN IS VERY GREAT**

215. Know that if one sees his neighbor transgressing a commandment of the Torah in secret, and he makes his sins public, his guilt is very great. For perhaps the sinner has repented of his evil way and is troubled in his thoughts. ("The heart knows its own bitterness"). It is proper to reveal them only to a discreet sage, who will not pass them on to others. One should keep himself from his company until it becomes known to him that he has repented of his evil way. And if the

sinner is a Torah scholar and one who fears sin, it should be assumed that he has indeed repented, and that though his evil inclination may have overpowered him once, he is bitter in consequence.

**THE TRANSGRESSION OF ONE WHO SAYS THE  
TRUTH IS IN SOME WAYS GREATER THAN  
THE ONE WHO SPEAKS WITH LIES**

216. There are two evils attaching to the slanderer: the injury and the shame which he causes his neighbor, and his choosing to render him reprehensible and iniquitous and to rejoice over his misfortune. In one respect the transgression of one who slanders through the truth is greater than that of one who slanders through falsehood; for-people will believe the first in that what he says of his neighbor rings of the truth. And the one who is so spoken of will appear despicable to them and will be despised by them after having regretted his evil and having been forgiven for his sins.

**THE FOOLS SEEKS OUT A MAN'S FAILINGS  
AND CASTS DISGRACE UPON HIM**

217. Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "The fool pleads a fault, but among the upright there is good will. The heart knows its own bitterness and with its joy no stranger can intermeddle" (Proverbs 14: 9-10). That is, the fool will argue an indictment. He will seek out a man's failings and cast disgrace upon them, and he will never speak in men's praise or of some good that is found in them, as is the case with flies, who always come to rest in squalid places. We are to read, "The fool pleads," in the singular, every single fool being

spoken of, as in "The branch runs over the wall" (Genesis 49: 22). And our Sages have said that all who are unfit, seek to render others so, and do not speak the world's praises, and are accustomed to attribute their own imperfections to those they would render unfit (Kiddushin 70b).

#### **AMONG THE UPRIGHT THERE IS GOOD WILL**

"But among the upright there is good will" - it is the practice of the upright to cover up all offenses and to praise one in whom a good thing is found. It is related in illustration of the principle in question that once a certain person and a sage passed a carcass, and the first saying, "How foul is the odor of this carcass!" the sage said, "How white are its teeth!"

The verse continues, "The heart knows its own bitterness." Every man of wisdom knows that Solomon did not insert useless things among his select statements of instruction. The above verse relates, then, to the one before it, its purpose being to declare the evil of the fool who pleads a fault. For it is possible that the sinner has repented of his ways and that his heart is bitter unto him; and no one knows a man's bitterness, or his happiness, but himself. And he has been forgiven, for the essence of repentance is the bitterness of one's heart. For this reason the fool who mentions his transgression sins and is guilty.

#### **THE PUNISHMENT FOR A PERSON WHO LOOKS FOR FAULTS IN OTHERS WHEN THE OTHERS ARE G-D FEARING**

218. It is for you to know that the punishment of the fool who pleads a fault obtains only in the case of his debasing one who

fears sin, who was caught up in his evil inclination and transgressed and incurred guilt; for it is his custom and his practice to regret his sins. And this certainly applies if it is known that he has repented.

**IT IS A MITZVAH TO SPEAK DEGRADINGLY OF  
SOMEONE WHO HAS NO FEAR OF G-D IN  
ORDER TO LOWER TRANSGRESSORS  
IN THE EYES OF MAN**

But if you know about a man, and his conduct has confirmed to you, that the fear of G-d is not before his eyes, and he always stands on a path which is not good, it is a mitzvah to speak degradingly of him, and to expose his sins, to lower transgressors in the eyes of men, and to cause the hearers to despise the wicked deeds. It is said, "An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous" (Proverbs 29: 27), and, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (ibid. 8: 13). And our Sages have said that a wicked man who is the son of a righteous man may be called "evildoer the son of an evildoer," and a righteous man who is the son of a wicked man may be called "righteous one, the son of a righteous one" (Sanhedrin 52a). And if you see that a man says something or does something, and what he says or does may be accounted either as reprehensible or as worthy, if that man fears G-d, truth demands that he be adjudged worthy, though the deed is closer to being incriminating and inclines one more to regard it as such.

**YOU MUST NOT DOUBT ABOUT AN AVERAGE  
MAN, YOU MUST JUDGE HIM FAVORABLY**

And if he is of the average class of men, who guard themselves from sinning, but who occasionally succumb, you must cast



aside the doubt and decide in favor of his worthiness. As our Sages of blessed memory have said, "One who adjudges his friend as worthy will himself be adjudged worthy by G-d" (Shabbat 127b). This is a positive commandment of the Torah, as it is said, "In righteousness shall you judge your neighbor" (Leviticus 19: 15). And if the deed points to the side of incrimination, let it be doubtful in your eyes, and do not decide it in favor of incrimination. But if most of the man's deeds are evil, or if you have established that the fear of G-d is not present in his heart, incline his deeds and his words to the side of incrimination, as it is said, "The righteous one considers the house of the wicked, overthrowing the wicked to their ruin" (Proverbs 21 : 12). We have already interpreted this verse.

### **DON'T DO TO A SLANDERER WHAT HE HAS DONE TO YOU**

219. Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "Be not a witness against your friend in vain; and grind not with your lips. Say not: 'I will do so to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work' " (Proverbs 24: 28). It is not necessary for him to exhort one, "Do not be a false witness;" he says, rather, "Do not be a witness in vain." If your friend is taken in a sin, do not bear witness against him, and do not reveal his sin in vain, to no purpose. For though if one has robbed or oppressed his friend, witness must be borne to this, so that, on the testimony of two witnesses, the stolen object will be returned, or, if only one witness is present, so that an oath be taken between the two, still if one sees his friend go astray in the area of illicit relations or in respect to another of the

transgressions, it is not proper for him to testify in vain, that is, to no purpose, although another witness be present with him to establish the fact. And if the sinner is one who fears sin, the observer should tell himself that he has certainly repented. He should also fear for his soul and say within his heart, "Since the man fears Heaven, perhaps his merits are more than his transgressions." Our Sages have said that one whose merits are more than his transgressions is of the congregation of the righteous (Kiddushin 39b).

**IF THE SINNER IS OF THE FOOLS WHO HAVE  
NO FEAR OF G-D THEN TELLING THE  
JUDGES MAY BE OF HELP**

If, however, the sinner is one of the foolish, whose habit is to repeat their transgression, it is best that the judges be told, so that they might reprimand him and separate him from what is forbidden. If there is only one witness, however, it is not good that a man, by himself, offer vain testimony, his testimony being vain in that it is not relied upon, as it is said, "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any transgression, or for any sin" (Deuteronomy 19: 15). He will thus be accounted the publisher of an evil name. The word "Vehafitita" is to be understood in the active sense, that is, "For with your lips you grind his face" through the greatness of his shame, by revealing the hiddenness of his transgression. After which it is said, "Say not: 'I will do so to him as he has done to me.'

**DO NOT TAKE REVENGE OR BEAR A GRUDGE  
AGAINST SOMEONE WHO REVEALED YOUR  
SIN: AND THIS IS A NOBLE TRAIT AND ONE OF  
THE ESSENTIALS OF FEAR**

- If he revealed your sin, do not take revenge or bear a grudge against him so as to do to him as he has done to you. This is a noble ethic and one of the essentials of fear. And if the sinner is one who does not fear G-d, such as one who casts off from himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and is not heedful of a certain transgression which is known to be a transgression by all the others of his fellow men, it is permitted to humiliate him and to speak degradingly of him. As our Sages have said in relation to the verse, "And ye shall not wrong one another" (Leviticus 25: 17) - "If one is with you in Torah and mitzvot, you shall not wrong him with words" (Bava Metzia 59a). If one, however, does not apply his heart to the word of G-d, it is permitted to humiliate him through his deeds, to make known his abominations, and to pour shame upon him. And they have said further, "Hypocrites should be exposed to prevent desecration of the Name" (Yoma 86b). But if one falls into sin by chance, and most of his days is wont to guard himself against his transgression, his sin should not be revealed, as we have explained.

**WHEN UNCOVERING SIN YOUR INTENTION  
MUST BE GOOD AND IF IT IS BECAUSE OF A  
GRUDGE THEN IT IS NOT GOOD**

"Do not be a witness against your friend in vain" may also be interpreted as referring to giving testimony against him in

respect to transgressions which you have been afflicted by just as he, for which reason he is called "your friend." This interpretation is borne out by its being said afterwards, "Say not: 'I will do so to him as he has done to me.'" For though it is a mitzvah to expose confirmed sinners and hypocrites, still, "if one's wickedness is to one such as he, and his sins, against a fellow man," he should not be exposed, for one's intention in the uncovering of his hiddenness is not to do good, but to rejoice in his misfortune. Furthermore, how can one not be ashamed to brand another with the disgrace of those deeds, when he himself holds on to them! And it is said, "And I will visit the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu" (Hosea I :4). Even though Jehu performed a mitzvah in cutting off the house of Ahab, he bore his transgressions, for he, too, had offended much.

**ONE CAN TELL THE SINS OF HIS NEIGHBOR  
TO HIS RABBI IF HE KNOWS HE WILL  
BELIEVE HIS WORDS**

220. Our Sages have said that one who testifies by himself against his neighbor receives stripes of rebellion (Pesachim 113b). He may, however, reveal the matter secretly to his teacher and to his intimate if he knows that they will believe his words as they would the words of two witnesses. And if there is a second witness with him, the judges should hear their words to reprimand the sinner in secret, and they should not shame him publicly, as it is said, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him" (Leviticus 19: 17).

**IT IS PERMISSIBLE TO RELATE SOMEONE'S  
WRONGDOING IN ORDER TO ASSIST  
THE ONE THAT HAS BEEN HURT**

221. Know that incidents between man and his neighbor, such as those involving theft, robbery, damage, the causing of pain, shaming, and wronging with words, may be revealed to others. Even a solitary observer should relate what he has seen, so as to assist him who has been wronged and to be jealous for the truth. And the Torah has stated that a single witness should testify before the court in cases of monetary claims, so as to oblige the claimer to take an oath. He must, however, reprove the man first.

**THE THIRD CATEGORY: TALE BEARERS WHO  
ARE INCLUDED AMONG THOSE WHO TALK  
LASHON HA RA, THE HARM DONE BY THEM  
CAN NOT BE ESTIMATED**

222. The third category is tale-bearing, concerning which we have been exhorted by the Torah, as it is said, "You shall not go as a tale-bearer among your people" (Leviticus 19: 16). This, too, is called slander [LASHON HA RA] and its practitioners are included in the class of those who utter slander, as our Sages of blessed memory characterize Doeg the Edomite as a slanderer for having told Saul that David came to the house of Ahimelech. The harm done by tale-bearing cannot be estimated, for it is infinite.

**THE TALE BEARER INCREASES  
HATRED IN THE WORLD**

The tale-bearer increases hatred in the world, and causes men to stumble and to transgress the Biblical injunction, "You shall

not hate your brother in your heart" (ibid. 17). The world subsists on peace, and because of hatred, "the earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved," as we previously explained. And very often the tale-bearer will put a sword into the hand of his friend, for the killing of his neighbor, as it is written, "In you have been tale-bearers to shed blood" (Ezekiel 22: 9). And it is said, "They are all grievous revolters, going about bearing tales; they are brass and iron; they all of them deal corruptly" (Jeremiah 6:28). Our Sages have referred to tale-bearing as "third-speech" (Yerushalmi Peah 1: 1), for it kills three: the speaker, the recipient, and its object, as is known from the episode of Doeg, wherein, because of his tale-bearing, he was undone, the priests were killed, and Saul, the recipient, was punished.

**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO ACCEPT TALES AND TO  
HATE ONE'S NEIGHBOR BECAUSE OF THEM  
BUT WHAT HE HAVE HEARD SHOULD NOT BE  
COMPLETELY DISCOUNTED**

223. Our Sages of blessed memory have said concerning tale bearing, that even though it is not permitted to accept it and to hate one's neighbor because of it, what is said should not be completely discounted, but one should guard himself and entertain some suspicion. Our Sages of blessed memory have said that in the generation of Saul there were tale-bearers, such as Doeg and the Ziphites, because of whom they went to war and were defeated. In the generation of Ahab there were no tale-bearers, as is known from the episode of the prophets who hid from Jezebel, as it is written, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord" (I Kings 18 : 22), whereas Obadiah hid

one hundred prophets of their number; and no one revealed that there was a prophet in Israel other than Elijah, for which reason they went to war and were victorious, although Ahab worshipped idols (Yerushalmi Peah 1 : 1).

**THE WORST LEVEL OF LASHON HA RA IS THE  
STIRRING OF QUARRELS AMONG  
BROTHERS AND LOVERS**

224. The stirring up of quarrels between brothers and lovers, and the implanting of hatred among them is the most serious of all the categories of slander, as it is said, "And he that sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:19). Our Sages of blessed memory have said that the seventh trait [that mentioned above] is the worst of all, as we previously explained in the Gates of the fear of sin (Vayikra Rabbah, Metzora 15 : 1).

**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO REVEAL THE SECRETS  
THAT ONE HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH**

225. One is duty-bound to conceal the secret which his friend reveals to him in privacy, although the revealing of that secret does not constitute tale-bearing; for the revelation of one's secret is injurious to him, and leads to the frustration of his plans, as it is said, "For want of secrecy purposes are frustrated" (Proverbs 15 : 22). Second, the revealer of secrets no sooner emerges from the realm of the secret, than he proceeds to break faith with his confidant. And Salomon said, "He that reveals secrets goes about as a tale-bearer" (ibid. 20: 19). That is, if you see a man who lacks the self-control to keep his tongue from revealing a secret, even though the revealing of

that secret may not constitute tale-bearing between a man and his neighbor, this trait will lead him into tale-bearing (one of the four evil classes), because of his tongue's not being within the province of his control. He says also, "He that goes about as a tale-bearer reveals secrets" (ibid. 11: 13). That is, do not entrust your secret to a tale-bearer; for since he does not guard his lips from tale-bearing, do not rely upon him to keep your secret, although you deliver your words to him in secrecy and concealment.

#### **IT IS FORBIDDEN TO ACCEPT LASHON HA RA**

The Torah has exhorted us not to accept slander, as it is said, "You shall not accept a false report" (Exodus 23: 1); and it is said, "If a ruler hearkens to falsehood, all his servants are wicked" (Proverbs 29: 12), which our Sages of blessed memory have interpreted as meaning that when the ruler accepts slander and tale-bearing, his servants become wicked and go about bearing tales so as to find favor in the eyes of their master (Midrash Tehilim 54). It is these three categories that we have mentioned, which our Sages of blessed memory had in mind when they spoke of the class of slanderers.

#### **THE FOURTH CATEGORY: AVAK LASHON HA RA – THE DUST OF SLANDER OR CAUSING OTHERS TO SPEAK LASHON HA RA**

226. The fourth category is that of the "dust of slander." Our Sages have said, "The majority of men fall prey to the sin of theft, a minority to that of illicit relations, and all, to that of the dust of slander" (Bava Batra 165a). They have explained the "dust of slander" as one's causing others to speak slander



through his words. And they said, "Let a man never speak in praise of his friend, for through his praises he will come to be disparaged" (Arachin 16a). This statement must be explained, for to speak in praise of sages and of righteous men is recognized as one of the most beautiful of traits. As it is said, "And the searching out of their glory is glory" (Proverbs 25: 7). And they have said about the fool that he does not speak in praise of mankind. This, then, is how the matter must be delimited: One should not speak in praise of another except in private, that is, as a man speaks to his friend, and not in public assembly or in the presence of many men - unless it is known to him that there is no one in that group who hates or who is jealous of him that he would speak in praise of. And if he wishes to praise a man who has already established himself with his people and who is known to be an upright man in whom will be found no evil and guilt, he may praise him even before one who hates him and who is jealous of him; for the hearer will not be able to disparage him. And if he does disparage him, all will know that his mouth has spoken falsely and his tongue will be a stumbling-block to him.

**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO PRAISE SOMEONE WHEN  
THIS PRAISE WILL LEAD THAT  
PERSON TO SOME LOSS**

227. Our Sages of blessed memory have said further in relation to slander that if a woman asks her neighbor for some hearth-coals and the latter answers, "Where are coals to be found as in the house of such and such, who is always roasting meat to eat?"-this, and all like it, is the "dust of slander" (Arachin 15b). And it is said, "He that blesses his friend with a loud

voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be accounted a curse to him" (Proverbs 27: 14). Our Sages interpreted this verse as referring to one who praises his neighbor with praise which leads to loss, as in the case of one's guest going to the public thoroughfare and calling out in a loud voice and telling about his host's graciousness to him, of his preparing meat and setting it before the guest who comes to him. When the guest's words will be heard, shiftless people will gather and will beleaguer the host's house (ibid. 16a).

**A PERSON MUST GUARD HIS MOUTH SO AS  
NOT TO BE REGARDED AS A SPEAKER  
OF LASHON HA RA**

A man must heed his mouth and his tongue so that his words not be suspected and so that he not be regarded as a speaker of slander. And if he causes himself thus to be suspected, he corrupts his character and is held accountable for the "dust of slander."

**BEFORE REPORTING A MISDEED ONE MUST  
FIRST TRY TO REBUKE THE WRONGDOER  
FOR MAYBE HE WILL CORRECT HIS WAYS**

228. And now concentrate deeply to get to the root of this matter. We have said before that it is permitted to speak degradingly of the sinner because of the wrong in his hands, if it is known that he has not departed from his way. This applies to such sinners as those who steal or rob; who cause damage or oppress; who humiliate, degrade, and shame or slander, and who do not return the theft, or pay for the damage or ask their neighbor's pardon so that their transgression may be forgiven. However, those who are careful to do what is right will first

speak to the sinner in the hope of succeeding, by way of reproof, to turn him from his evil way. And if he still refuses, they will then make public his ways and his wicked deeds. And now, if a man searches out his friend's deed of malice against his neighbor, and relates it to others, and reveals the sinner's reprehensibility, and disparages his deed from many points of view, the teller will be suspect and will be regarded as a slanderer, people saying, "Even if what he said were true, he should have sought to instruct the sinner first."

**IF YOU DON'T REBUKE FIRST THEN YOU WILL  
BE SUSPECTED OF LASHON HA RA AND OF  
BEING A FLATTERER AND OF HATING YOUR  
FRIEND IN YOUR HEART**

And because of his not having first offered reproof, the hearer will suspect him, saying that he would not say all this in his neighbor's presence, but would flatter him, as it is said, "Yet let no man strive, neither let any man reprove" (Hosea 4: 41) and he enjoys speaking of people's guilt, rejoicing in their misdeeds, and honoring himself through their shame, when not in their presence. He is similar to the slanderer, and the "dust of slander" has settled upon him. People will also say, "These things are not true; he is fabricating them. If not, why did he not first reveal his transgression to his face rather than conceal it from him?"

**IF YOU REBUKED THE SINNER FIRST THEN  
YOU WILL BE BELIEVED AND NOT  
SUSPECTED OF WRONGDOING**

This underlies the statement of our Sages that everything which is said in the presence of the one it is said about is not in

the nature of slander (Arachin 15b). That is, if one first openly rebuked his neighbor for his deed, and the latter did not pay heed to his words, he may then make known to others the man's guilt and his evil character, and he will not be suspected of desiring to disgrace his neighbor. Likewise, if it is publicly acknowledged that the speaker is one who does not play favorites or sugar his words for any man, that everything he will say when not in his neighbor's presence he will also speak to his face, and that he will not fear any man, it also being established among his fellow men that he speaks only the truth, then he is not to be suspected when speaking of one man's guilt to another when not in the presence of the former. And thus did our Sages of blessed memory indicate in speaking of this matter, saying, "R. Yossi said, 'I never said a thing and turned back' (ibid.); that is, "I never said something about another when not in his presence, which I suppressed when face to face with him." They said further, "Everything which is said before three men is not in the nature of slander" (ibid. 15b), that is, in view of the fact that they were with him in public when he spoke what he did, it certainly became known to his neighbor, and it is as if he spoke the words in his presence.

**THE FIFTH CATEGORY: OBSCENE  
LANGUAGE; IT CONVERTS GOOD DECREES  
TO EVIL ONES, G-D FORBID**

229. The fifth category is that of obscene speech. Our Sages of blessed memory have said, "If one speaks obscenely, even if seventy good years were decreed for him, they are converted to evil" (Shabbat 33a). And Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord

shall have no joy in their young men; neither shall He have compassion on their fatherless and widows. For everyone is unG-dly and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks wantonness. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (Isaiah 9: 16). And because of this, one who speaks obscenely is heavy with sin and detestable and abhorrent; for he has departed from and forsaken shame and modesty, which are the recognized traits of the "holy seed," and has walked upon the paths of audacity, the trait of wicked reprobates.

**HE WHO USES OBSCENE LANGUAGE  
DESECRATES THE HOLINESS OF ISRAEL, HIS  
STENCH AND FOULNESS RISE UP**

Furthermore, he has desecrated the holiness of Israel, as it is said, "And they shall say, `Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deuteronomy 4: 6); and these pursue the path of despicable fools, who are far removed from the path of wisdom, which is all beauty and pleasantness. Their stench and their foulness rise up. Every wise and understanding man will utterly abominate and detest them. They desecrate the vessels of wisdom, which are the most precious of all the desirable vessels, as it is said, "But the lips of knowledge are a precious vessel" (Proverbs 20 : 15).

The punishment of one who gives ear to obscene speech is great, because he does not block his ear, and he does not separate himself from speakers of obscenity. About such a one it is said, "The mouth of strangeness is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein" (ibid. 22: 14).

**AVOIDING OBSCENE LANGUAGE IS A FENCE  
AGAINST SEVERE TRANSGRESSIONS**

230. Our Sages have said, "Let a man never utter an unseemly thing; for Scripture twisted eight letters in order not to pronounce an unseemly thing, as it is said, ' . . . and of beasts that are not clean' (Genesis 7 : 8)" (Pesachim 3a); for at that time unclean beasts were permitted to be eaten, but they were not clean for sacrificial purposes. It is, therefore, considered unseemly speech for a man to degrade those things which serve as food for man; and a man must take care not to utter anything unseemly, even if his avoiding unseemly speech will entail lengthening his words and broadening his discourse. This is a kind of fence to keep one from obscene speech, which is among the more severe transgressions; and it is also a fence to keep one from slandering and insulting his fellow men, as our Sages of blessed memory said in respect to keeping far from unseemly speech, "Scripture did not even refer to an unclean animal in terms of disparagement" (Bava Batra 123a). Our Sages said that when one of the priests said before R. Yochanan ben Zakkai, "My share of the show-bread amounts to the size of a lizard's tail," he was investigated and found to possess a disqualifying factor (ibid.).

**THE TONGUE OF THE RIGHTEOUS IS AS  
CHOICE SILVER (PROVERBS 10:20)**

Our Sages said further that a man must choose respectful terms with which to express himself, and to avoid terms which are not respectful, even though they may not be unseemly, both when conversing in Torah or in the affairs of the world, only taking care not to be verbose because of this when conversing

in Torah, for one must exercise brevity in teaching his students.

By "respectful speech" is meant the manner of speech and conversation employed by the clean-minded, and by men of pure speech, who weigh their words and recognize the difference between what is respectful speech and what is not, as it is said, "And choose the tongue of the crafty" (Job 15: 5), and, "And that which my lips know, they shall speak clearly" (ibid. 33 : 3), and, "The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver" (Proverbs 10 : 20).

#### **THE SIXTH CATEGORY: THE GRUMBLER AND THE COMPLAINER WHO CONSTANTLY FINDS FAULT IN EVERYTHING**

231. The sixth category is that of the grumbler. Salomon, may Peace be upon him, has said, "The words of the grumbler are as those of the beaten; and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Proverbs 18: 8). The "grumbler" is one whose practice and nature is to complain and grumble and to constantly find fault with his neighbor, with his deeds and words, although his neighbor is completely innocent in his dealings with him, and has done nothing against him.

#### **THE COMPLAINER JUDGES EVERYTHING ADVERSELY AND LOOKS AT HIMSELF AS OPPRESSED AND SHOOTS ARROWS AT HIS FRIENDS WHO HAVE DONE GOOD TO HIM**

But he judges everything adversely and not favorably, and converts every unintentional deed into an intentional one, and fancies himself oppressed and beaten, and sorely sinned

against by his neighbor. It is he, however, who is the striker and the beater, for his words descend to the pit of the stomach. For one who vents complaints against his neighbor, who has not offended him, and who has done only good with him, sets a tempest raging at one's heart, and it is as if he shoots arrows which descend to one's innards. The word "kemitlahamim" in the above verse is to be read as "kemithalmim" "as those of the beaten," as in the case of "simlah," "salmah," and is comparable to "They have beaten me and I knew it not" (ibid. 23: 35), as if it had been stated, "The words of the grumbler are as those of the beaten one, the plural form, "the beaten," being employed; for "grumbler" is a generic term including all grumblers, as in ". . . and the hallowed flesh have passed from thee" (Jeremiah 11 : 15), and ". . . that they may bring forth a saving" (Isaiah 48 : 5).

**THE GRUMBLER DENIES GOOD AND REPAYS  
GOOD WITH EVIL AND REGARDS THE  
KINDNESS FROM HASHEM AS RETRIBUTION**

King Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said further, "A grumbler separates a devoted friend" (Proverbs 16: 28); that is, he separates from himself a lover and a friend, for they cannot support his friendship. And our Sages have said, "Do not multiply complaints lest you come to sin" (Derech Eretz Zutah 9). And often the grumbler denies good, even deeming it evil; and about one who returns evil for good it is said, "Whoever rewards evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house" (Proverbs 17 : 13). Sometimes, too, he regards the kindnesses of G-d as revenge and retribution, as it is said, ". . .



and you grumbled in your tents; and said: `Because the Lord hated us, He has brought us forth...' " (Deuteronomy 1: 27).

Remove yourself, then, from the way of the grumblers, for "they have made crooked paths for themselves; all who go therein do not know peace" (Isaiah 59: 8); and teach your tongue to judge with favor, and let righteousness be the girdle of your loins.

*Salomon, may Peace be upon him, said, "The north wind prevents the rain, and an angry countenance a backbiting tongue" (Proverbs 25:23). That is, just as the north wind scatters the clouds and prevents the rain, so does an angry countenance prevent slander. For if the teller sees that the hearer's face is angry, he will stop the roaring flood of his words; but if he perceives the hearer to be listening to him, "he will drink iniquity like water" and will not keep his mouth from his lies.*

*Our Sages of blessed memory have said, "If one speaks obscenely, even if seventy good years were decreed for him, they are converted to evil" (Shabbat 33a). And Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men; neither shall He have compassion on their fatherless and widows. For everyone is ungodly and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks wantonness. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (Isaiah 9: 16).*

## CHAPTER 8

### SELECTIONS FROM THE HOLY ZOHAR, MIDRASHIM, RESHIT CHOCHMA, KAV HA YASHAR AND OTHER WORKS OF MUSSAR

#### EVIL WORDS MOUNT UP AND STIR THE SERPENT AND A SPIRIT OF IMPURITY ENTERS THE PERSON WHO SPOKE THOSE EVIL WORDS

Hence the Torah proclaims, "Keep your tongue from evil", etc. (Ps. 34, 14), because if a man's lips and tongue speak evil words, those words mount aloft and all proclaim "keep away from the evil word of so-and-so, leave the path clear for the mighty serpent". Then the holy soul leaves him and is not able to speak: it is in shame and distress, and is not given a place as before. Hence it is written, "Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21, 23). For that soul which was vocal is reduced to silence on account of the evil word. Then the serpent gets ready, and when that evil word finds its way to him, then many spirits bestir themselves, and one spirit comes down from that side and finds the man who uttered the evil word, and lights upon him and defiles him, and he becomes leprous. And just as a man is punished for uttering

an evil word, so he is punished for not uttering a good word when he had the opportunity, because he harms that speaking spirit which was prepared to speak both above and below in holiness. All the more so if the people walk in crooked ways and he is able to speak to them and reprove them and does not do so.

THE HOLY ZOHAR TAZRIA 46B

**THE ONE WHO USES HIS TONGUE AS A  
SWORD IS PUNISHED WITH  
THE SWORD OF HASHEM**

And the Lord spoke to Moshe saying. R. Abba cited here the verse: "Be afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishments of the sword, that you may know there is a judgment" (job 19, 29). 'Observe,' he said, 'that through LASHON HA RA, the evil tongue of the serpent, death came upon the world. The evil tongue is called a "sharp sword" (PS. 57, 5), and therefore it says, "Be afraid of the sword", meaning, of the evil tongue LASHON HA RA. Why? "For wrathful are the punishments of the sword", this is, the sword of the Lord, "that you may know there is a judgment", for he that has a sword in his tongue is punished with the sword; hence it says, "this is the law of the leper [METZORA]".'

THE HOLY ZOHAR METZORAH 52B

**HASHEM PARDONS ALL SINS  
EXCEPT LASHON HA RA**

G-d grants pardon for all sins to those who do Teshuvah save for the evil tongue [LASHON HA RA] and for he who gives an evil name to his friend [MOTZI SHEM RA], as it is written.

"This shall be the law of the leper", the word METZORAH (leper) being interpreted MOTZI SHEM RA (slanderer). R. Chiya said: 'Whoever spreads false reports, all his limbs become defiled and he is liable for shutting up, because his evil speech rises aloft and calls down an unclean spirit on him. So it says: "How has the faithful city become an harlot" (Isa. 1, 21). Because Jerusalem uttered evil speech [LASHON HA RA], G-d departed from her and a spirit of murderers abode in her. If that was the fate of Jerusalem the holy city, how much more so must it be that of ordinary men. Hence it says, "This shall be the law of the leper".' R. Judah said: 'Zot (this)' indeed shall confront him to punish him for his evil speech.

**THE HOLY ZOHAR METZORAH 53A**

R' Shimon Bar Yochai said: Of everything is the Holy One, Blessed is He, forgiving except for LASHON HA RA.

The Zohar ha Kaddosh Parashat Shelach 161

### **THE GREAT PUNISHMENT FOR ONE WHO INSULTS HIS FRIEND OR CALLS HIS FRIEND A RASHA**

We have been taught that because Israel is designated "holiness" no one is allowed to apply to his neighbor an insulting epithet or to bestow upon him a degrading nickname. The punishment for such an offense is indeed great. It is written: "Keep your tongue from evil" (Ps. 34, 15). "From evil": for slander and malicious speech cause disease to enter into the world. Said R. Jose: 'He who offends his neighbor by giving him an insulting nickname or by addressing him in abusive terms will himself eventually suffer for offenses which

he has not committed.' In this connection R. Chiya also said in the name of R. Hezekiah: 'He who calls his neighbor "wicked" will be thrown into the very jaws of Gehinomm. The only people whom one may legitimately call "wicked" are those who speak impudently and blasphemously against the Torah.' Once, when on a journey, R. Jesse passed close by a man who was cursing and reviling his neighbor; and the Rabbi said to him: "You behave like a wicked one (rasha)." Those who were with R. Jesse, hearing his words, were shocked, thinking that he had assuredly committed a great offense; so they brought him before R. Judah to be judged. In defense he pleaded that he had not called the man "wicked", but only told him that he had behaved "like a wicked one." R. Judah was puzzled, and put the case before R. Eleazar, who said: 'The Rabbi has Scripture on his side...

The Holy Zohar Mishpatim 122

### **ANYONE CAN MERIT THE RUACH HA KODESH IF HE GUARDS HIS MOUTH AND HIS TONGUE**

“And Esther was dressed in Malchut” (Esther 5:1) She was dressed in the Malchut which is holy and elevated, certainly she was dressed with the RUACH HA KODESH. What is the reason she deserved such place? Because she kept her mouth from talking anything, and this is what is written: (Esther 2:20) “And Esther doesn’t talk about her birthplace” and so we have learned: All those who guard their mouth and their tongue merit thereby to be dressed in the RUACH HA KODESH.

The Zohar ha Kadosh Chukat 183

**ALL THE WARNINGS OF THE TALMUD AND  
THE ZOHAR CONCERN THE SPEAKER OF  
LASHON HA RA BUT THE ONE WHO MIXES HIS  
REPORT WITH FALSEHOOD HIS PUNISHMENT  
IS MUCH MORE SEVERE**

We must let people know that all the warnings mentioned by our Sages in the Talmud and in the Holy Zohar refer to the sin of LASHON HA RA, that the sinner says something which is true regarding his friend, with the intention of denigrating him...But if he says something false regarding his friend, this is not called LASHON HA RA but it is called MOTZI SHEM RA and his punishment is doubled and redoubled for he spoke falsehood regarding the sons of the Holy One Blessed be He...

**THE WORST LASHON HA RA IS TO TALK  
ABOUT THE SHORTCOMINGS OF SOMEONE'S  
SERVICE TO HASHEM**

And even when there is talk between two friends regarding the sins another person has done and they talk about his shortcomings in his service to the Creator Blessed be He, and even if everything that was said is the truth, there is no greater LASHON HA RA than this, for what benefit there is for the Holy One Blessed be He in all the things they have spoken regarding the service of that person? Aren't all secrets revealed before Him Blessed be He? Also what benefit is there to the person they are talking about? For he doesn't listen to their reproof that they are saying on his back. Nevertheless, it would be proper for them to reprove this person, so that they can show him his shortcomings, and it could be that through

this reproof he will turn away from his shortcomings and from this the Holy One Blessed be He will be pleased, for that person was turned from his evil ways to the service of the Holy One Blessed be He...

Sefer Yesod ve Shores ha Avoda Shaar 10, Chapter 2

### THE ONE WHO TALKS LASHON HA RA REINCARNATES IN A STONE OR IN A DOG

And there are other types of reincarnations...and some reincarnate in minerals more precisely in stones in the field like NAVAL HA KARMELI about whom it says (Samuel 1, 25:35): “And he became a stone”, because he returned reincarnated in a stone for having spoken LASHON HA RA to the servants of King David peace be upon him...And sometimes the BAAL LASHON HA RA will reincarnate in a dog and also the one who feeds Terefot to the Jews he also reincarnates in dogs and this is insinuated in the Torah for it is written (Shemot 22:30) “And you shall be holy men to me; nor shall you eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs”. And right after it is written (Shemot 23:1) “You shall not raise a false report; put not your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness”. We see then that throwing it to the dogs is written between these two things: the meat which is Terefot and the one who gives a false report, to indicate us that for these two actions a person must reincarnate in dogs. And the Mekubalim wrote about this and it is further insinuated in the words of our Sages when they said: “All those who relate LASHON HA RA it is proper to throw them to the dogs” And this is what King David insinuated when he said (Psalms 22:21): “Save my soul from

the sword; my only one from the power of the dog” and afterwards he said (Psalms 22:23): “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation will I praise you” to say that I do not engage my tongue in LASHON HA RA so that I will be punished through reincarnating in this terrible way but I use my tongue to praise you and to warn Israel to fear you and praise you.

Sefer Charedim Perek 33

### **ARGUMENTS ON THIS LOWER WORLD ARE CONSIDERED IDOLATRY FOR THEY CAUSE DIVISION IN THE UPPER WORLDS**

Because of the sins of arguments and baseless hatred among us, our exile has so been lengthened that we haven't yet been redeemed. Because all the upper worlds are united one to the other and when we show division in the lower world, we cause thereby division in the three higher worlds, and you will not find a greater AVODA ZARA than this and therefore they said in the Talmud (Yevamot 96) that there was once a big fight in a synagogue in Tiberias, and one of the men there stood up and said that because of that sin that synagogue would become a house of worship for idolatry, measure for measure, and so it happened...

### **BASELESS HATRED AND LASHON HA RA DAMAGE THE UNITY OF THE UPPER WORLDS**

Therefore every Jew will be most careful and will fear damaging the upper unity through the sin of baseless hatred or LASHON HA RA or fighting, G-d forbid, and he will take it to



**heart that in order to fulfill the first 2 of the 10 commandments he has to have a deep love and peace and friendship with all Jews, and he will strive to bring peace to the world...**

**Sefer Charedim, Perek 7**

**THE ONE WHO TALKS LASHON HA RA HAS  
SPILLED LOTS OF BLOOD**

**And if you see a man that occupies himself with LASHON HARA know that he has spilled lots of blood**

**Sefer Shevet Mussar 10:32**

**THE PERSON MUST REINCARNATE FOR  
EVERY SPEECH PRONOUNCED WITHOUT  
FEAR AND LOVE OF G-D**

**A man must be watchful about everything he says that whatever comes out from his mouth must be with fear and love. See what is written in the Sefer Reshit Chochma (Fear 13, 85) in the name of the Tikkune Zohar (70, p. 132a) that any part of the body that was not rectified as it should have must come again in reincarnation, and even the voice and the speech that one pronounced without fear and love so that the name of G-d will be complete, has to come back in reincarnation; and the punishment of reincarnation is more bitter to the soul than that of Gehinomm. And how much more careful must a man be to guard his mouth and his tongue, that they will not become contaminated through LASHON HARA and even worse through obscene language, G-d forbid, for then HE**

**WILL BE CALLED IMPURE IMPURE (Vayikra 13:45).  
Therefore every man should tremble and fear the great and  
terrible Day of Judgment and 'One who guards his mouth and  
tongue, guards his soul from tribulations' (Proverbs 21:23)...  
Sefer Shevet Mussar 20:20**

**IF A MAN LOVES PEACE HOW WILL HE SPEAK  
LASHON HA RA AGAINST ANYONE ELSE?**

**LASHON HA RA and anger are the two tails of the UDIM  
They are the root of all sin as it is known from our Rabbis Z'L  
for LASHON HA RA kills the soul (Arachin 15b) and the  
angry person is as if he is serving idols (Zohar Korach  
179a)...And if a man loves peace how will he speak LASHON  
HA RA and be angry at any other man which is something  
contrary to peace? And the sign of someone who loves peace:  
He always praises his fellow Jew and he judges every man to  
the side of merit, and he doesn't demand what he deserves and  
has always a smile on his face and is happy with his portion...**

**HE WHO IS AT PEACE WITH EVERY MAN THE  
HOLY ONE BLESSED BE HE IS  
AT PEACE WITH HIM**

**...And when a person conducts himself peacefully with every  
man then this brings him to be in peace with his Maker, so that  
he sins not in front of His Maker and thus upset Him...And in  
particular when a man thinks in his mind that if he has no  
peace with the Holy One Blessed be He then he has no peace  
with his own soul, because "The soul of the sinner will perish"**

(Ezekiel 18:20) And he will find that since he is not in peace with the Holy One Blessed be He and he sins in front of Him, then he divides his soul for the soul is complete by way of peace...

Sefer Shevet Mussar 37:18

**THE HOLY ONE SAYS: ME AND THE  
SLANDERER CAN NOT LIVE IN THIS WORLD**

Further did R. Hisda say in the name of Mar 'Ukba: Of him who slanders, the Holy One, blessed be He, says: He and I cannot live together in the world, as it is said: Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I destroy; whoso is haughty of eye and proud of heart, him will I not suffer. Do not read: 'Otho [him] will I not suffer', but 'Itto with him can I not suffer to be together'. Some refer this to the arrogant.

Talmud Babli Arachin 15

**THERE ARE GROUPS OF DAMAGING ANGELS  
WHO RECORD AND THEN PUNISH MEN FOR  
ALL VAIN AND EVIL UTTERANCES**

And you should know that there is a group of spirits from the forces of evil called KESILIM [Fools] and they control and bring fear to men...And they have control on men who sit and gather to talk about vain matters that have no benefit. And these destructive spirits who are also called POALE AVEN [Workers of iniquity], they record all empty utterances and scornful words and all the LASHON HA RA in a book above, and when the time comes for these people to stand in trial

when they depart from this world, these spirits come and take hold of their souls and take them to the deserts and other places in order to bring great suffering and pain to these souls...

**ONE NEEDS TO FLEE FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE INVOLVED IN ARGUMENTS AND FIGHTS FOR THAT'S THE PLACE OF THE EVIL SIDE**

Therefore a person needs to distance himself from the groups of scorners and there is no need to say that when someone sees a group of people arguing and fighting, that he has to flee from them for there is the meeting place of the external forces, that gather where there is strife and fighting. And from this you will understand the damage done when we say useless words in the synagogues which is a place of holiness, a place established for the mouths of men to be filled with the breath of songs of praise and supplications.

(Kav ha Yashar, chap. 3)

**40 MINISTERING ANGELS WHO JUDGE THE PERSON FOR LASHON HA RA**

And just as actions refrain the soul from ascending to the place of Kedusha, just the same speech like LASHON HARA and obscene language damage the soul and 40 ministering angels seclude and judge the person, until the person regrets his actions and does Teshuvah.

Kav ha Yashar Chapter 61

**IF A PERSON CURSES FREQUENTLY THEN HE  
SHOULD KNOW HE COMES FROM  
THE EREV RAV**

And these things are brought in the writings of our Master, the holy ARIZAL From the things a person says we can know the root of his soul above. If a person is frequently cursing or arguing, then he should know that his soul comes from the Sitra Achra whose root is that of the Serpent and he is not from the Holy people but he is a reincarnation from the Erev Rav.

(Kav ha Yashar, chap. 3)

**WHEN THE MOUTH REFRAINS SPEAKING  
LASHON HA RA THEN IT IS CALLED THE  
HOLY MOUTH**

And because the mouth of those who speak damaging words speak great amounts, 10 chapters would not be enough to mention the immensity of their punishment, therefore I warn them briefly, that a man needs to know that the mouth when it is kept and protected from saying defamation and curses, and doesn't talk LASHON HA RA and does not occupy itself with scorning, that mouth is then called HOLY MOUTH for the Holy One Blessed be He exults Himself through that mouth, and even more so the one who occupies himself with Torah and Tefillah and songs of praise, the Holy One Blessed be He elevates those words and makes a crown for His head when the person prays with concentration

(Kav ha Yashar, chap. 3)

**THE BREATH THAT IS NOT OF TORAH GOES  
TO THE SIDE OF THE KELIPOT AND THEN  
JUDGE THE MAN WHEN HE DIES**

From what we have read we see that there is a difference between the holy breath that comes from the studying of Torah and the breath that is not holy. For this breath that is not holy goes to the side of the KELIPOT [EVIL HUSKS] and builds edifices of nothingness (Jeremiah 10:15). The rule is that according to what man builds in this world, his soul will fare after his death as we have explained from what is written in the Holy Zohar Beshalach, unless he returns in strong and complete Teshuvah in order to annul all the worlds and firmaments that he created in the side of the KELIPAH.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 10

**THE SPEECH OF THE PERSON MUST BE WITH  
FEAR AND LOVE OF HASHEM SO THAT  
HASHEM WILL BE WITH THE PERSON**

In the Tikkune Zohar (132a) it is written: “The mouth and the heart correspond to the Written Torah and to the Oral Torah [The heart to the written and the mouth to the oral], the voice and the words that come out of his mouth correspond to the letters VAV and HE of the Holy Name of HASHEM and the person must pronounce them with fear and love which correspond to the letters YUD and HE and if not the name YUD - HE and VAV – HE doesn’t dwell on the speech”. And just as the mouth reveals what is hidden in the heart, does the Oral Torah reveal what is hidden in the Written Torah.

**A PERSON MUST MAKE THE HEART AND THE  
MOUTH EQUAL: THAT THE PERSON WILL  
TALK WHAT HE HAS INSIDE HIS HEART**

And the intention here is to teach us to make the heart and the mouth equal, and with this they are united. But if the person talks one thing with his mouth and another thing with his heart, he separates and “cuts what is planted”. And we can conclude from all this that he who damages his mouth or his words, the name YUD KE VAV KE does not dwell there and he will be forced to come in reincarnation to correct what he damaged, and just as the punishment is great, so the reward for the one who sanctifies himself through his mouth is great, for he sanctifies the Shechina which is called PE [Mouth] and through this he merits to have the RUACH HA KODESH as we have said before.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 10

**SINCE EVERY WORD IS JUDGED IN HEAVEN  
THEN IT IS BETTER FOR THE PERSON TO  
TALK LESS IN ORDER TO  
DIMINISH JUDGMENTS**

And since The Holy One Blessed be He judges everything that a man says together with all the heavenly angels, whether his words are right or not, then it is good for man to diminish the amount of his words so that he diminishes the judgments from upon him

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 10

**SPEECH GOES UP DIRECTLY THROUGH  
HEAVEN WHILE THE OTHER MITZVOT  
MESSENGERS RECORD THEM AND TAKE  
THEM UP TO HEAVEN**

And we have proof to what we have said from the words of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai Peace be upon him that the speech has a higher level than the rest of the Mitzvot that a man does, because the rest of the Mitzvot that a person does with his actions (Zecharia 4:10) “Seven are the eyes of Hashem”...that travel through the land and with them are recorded all the Mitzvot or the sins that a man does. But regarding speech Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai explained that the voice itself raises upwards and there it is examined...

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 10

**AVOID TALKING LASHON HA RA SO THAT  
YOU ARE NOT CALLED EVIL BY HASHEM**

And after having mentioned that there are two Brits and they correspond to one another, the Brit of the Membrum and the Brit of the Tongue, just as regarding the Brit of the Membrum one who spills semen in vain is called RA, just the same regarding the Brit of the tongue whoever emits a word in vain is like the one who spills semen in vain and therefore the verse says NETZOR LESHONECHA ME RA, so that this person will not be called RA, if he says words in vain as we already explained.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 11



**THE TONGUE IS THE PLACE OF LIFE AND IT'S  
NOT PROPER FOR IT TO ISSUE  
WORDS IN VAIN**

And to explain why the one who emits his semen in vain and the one who says words in vain is called RA, is what we already mentioned, because the Tongue is in the place of life as we already explained regarding the expression: "Who is the man who desires life? And just as the semen is the life force to the physical aspect of man like the light of his eyes, etc. and it causes birth in the physical plane, and the one who emits semen in vain is called RA because of the secret and the insinuation that is in it above, just the same the word of the Tongue which is an axe, The secret of the spiritual life force that invests in the Tongue and gives birth above to in the spiritual Keddusha, and it is not proper that it will come out in vain. And this is a great level, that the person will not say anything in vain all his life, and even though we said that for one vain speech one is called RA, anyway anything that is damaged and refers to the external force is called RA and the proof is, LASHON HA RA, the Tongue which is called RA, that it damages and even if there is some benefit to the one who says that speech, anyway he is called RA from himself for the exterior forces have a portion in him.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 11

**SIX THINGS SERVE THE PERSON THREE ARE  
UNDER HIS CONTROL AND THREE ARE NOT**

Rabbi Levi said: Six things serve the person, three are under his control and three are not. The ear, the nose and the eye are

not under his control. He sees what he doesn't want to see, he hears what he doesn't want to hear and he smells what he doesn't want to smell. The mouth, the hand and the foot are under his control. If he wants he talks of Torah, if he wants he destroys with his mouth and if he wants he doesn't. The hand, if he wants it hands out Tzeddaka, if he wants it steals and kills. The foot if he wants, it takes him to the synagogues and houses of study. If he wants, the foot takes him to theatres and circuses. When a man is meritorious, The Holy One Blessed be He makes the ones that are not under his control to be under his control. The mouth as it is written (Bereshit 27:33): "He will also be blessed", the hand (Kings I 13:4) "And his hand dried up" and the foot (Proverbs 1:15) "My son, don't go on the road with them"

Bereshit Rabba 67:3

**THE ONE WHO TALKS OBSCENE LANGUAGE  
DEFILES HIMSELF AND IS FURTHER DEFILED  
FOR THIS SIN LEADS TO SPILLING  
SEMEN IN VAIN**

We can also say regarding the verse NETZOR LESHONECHA ME RA (Psalms 34:15) that the one who blemishes his mouth with obscene language and the like, they make him impure and he comes to spill semen in vain, to show him that he is evil RA as it is explained in the Zohar (Bereshit 8a): "Rab Hamnuna said: Suffer not your mouth to bring your flesh to sin" (Kohelet 5:5) This is a warning to men not to say words that might suggest evil thoughts and cause through this

that his sacred body on which is the sign of the holy covenant will come to sin. For whoever does this is taken to Gehinomm...”

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 11

### **THE SOUL GIVES ACCOUNT EACH DAY OF EVERY WORD UTTERED DURING THE DAY**

Observe that when mankind lie asleep and experience a foretaste of death, the soul of each ascends on high and to an assigned region. There she is examined concerning all the actions she performed during the day. These are recorded on a book. Indeed, the soul then gives evidence concerning man's works, and concerning each word that issued from his mouth. Should that word be an appropriate word, a holy word of Torah study or of prayer, it will cleave its way through the heavens until it reaches an assigned place. There it halts until night falls, when the soul ascends, seizes that word and presents it to the King. An improper word, however, a word uttered by an evil tongue, goes up to its assigned spot, where it is put on record, charging the man with the commission of a sin. Of this Scripture says: "Keep the doors of your mouth from her that lies in your bosom" (Micah VII, 5) Hence the Psalm says: "Happy is the man unto whom the Lord counts not iniquity", meaning, the man "in whose spirit there is no deceit".'

THE HOLY ZOHAR NASSO 121b

**THE PERSON WAS DIFFERENTIATED  
THROUGH SPEECH FROM ALL OTHER  
CREATURES, THEREFORE HE MUST BE  
WATCHFUL ABOUT THIS HIGHER QUALITY**

And what we can conclude from everything we have said is that a man needs to watch his tongue from everything that damages it, be it LASHON HA RA or obscene language or vain things, and we have expanded ourselves regarding the value of silence, for after a person has been differentiated from the beasts and from the animals because of his speech, and has been furthermore been equated with the angels, it is proper for the person to sanctify his speech as they said in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachot 9:5) “Rabbi Levi said: All talks are evil except talks of Torah that is good”

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 11

**JUST AS A DOOR IS MADE TO CLOSE AN  
ENTRANCE TO THE HOUSE, JUST THE SAME  
THE MOUTH MUST BE CLOSED TO AVOID  
ISSUING EVIL SPEECH**

The rule of everything we have said is the following: Just as a person makes a door for an opening, and there are times when the door should be closed and others when it should be opened, in the same way the person should close the doors of his mouth with the two doors, the lips and the teeth. And he should be very careful before opening his mouth and should guard his tongue. Just as he would guard his money and his possessions in a drawer within his dwelling and would lock them safely,

just the same he should do with his mouth. See how careful the Rishonim were regarding not saying anything in vain to the point that they would praise the fact that they never said anything in vain in their entire lives. And in this practice there is a great correction leading to have concentration during prayers, because most of the loss of concentration during prayers comes from vain matters that the person has fixed in his heart. Also silence is a great fence that leads to the attainment of fear of heaven, because it is impossible to be Yire Shamaim (G-d fearing) with a heart that multiplies words.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 11

#### **THE FOUR CLASSES OF PEOPLE THAT WILL NOT BEHOLD THE SHECHINAH CORRESPOND TO FOUR IMPURE ANIMALS**

Our Sages of blessed memory have said (Sotah 42b): "Four classes do not behold the Divine Presence: the class of scoffers, the class of liars, the class of flatterers, and the class of slanderers [Speakers of LASHON HA RA] And I heard in the name of the Mekubalim that corresponding to the 4 classes of people that will not behold the Shechinah there are 4 impure animals The Coney, The Hare, The Camel and The Pig. And corresponding to those there are 4 KELIPOT above that elevate the actions of the transgressor to punish him in Gehinomm. And I also heard that he who sinned and belongs to those 4 classes, in the future will reincarnate in those 4 impure animals mentioned above, each one in its corresponding animal.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12

**THE ONE WHO CAN STUDY TORAH BUT  
DOESN'T, IS CONSIDERED A SCOFFER**

Even the one who is able to occupy himself with the Torah but he does not, even if he is not talking things that scoffers talk about, his seating is considered the seating of scoffers as we learned in the Mishna of Avot (3:2) “Two who sit and there are no words of Torah between them it is considered the sitting of scorners..”, and it is not enough that he sins with his soul and destroys the life of the world to come and inherits Gehinom but he also causes many to sin. For when he is involved in useless matters, causes the hearts of many to concentrate in empty things and their sin is considered to be of his doing.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12 quoting  
Rabbi Aboab ZTK'L from the Sefer Menorat ha Maor 1:81

**THE FLATTERER IS WORSE THAN A THIEF**

And in the Sefer Menorat ha Maor of Rabbi Israel peace be upon him, he wrote: “And the flatterer is worse than a thief for a thief steals money but the flatterer steals the minds of people.  
Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12

**IN SOME CASES WE MAY FLATTER SOMEONE:  
IN THE CASE OF A WIFE, IN THE CASE OF A  
CREDITOR AND IN THE CASE OF BRINGING  
SOMEONE CLOSE TO THE TORAH**

I found written in a book dealing with things of Chassidut and this is what it says: “There are three whom we are allowed to flatter: One's wife because of SHALOM BAIT [Peace in the home] To a creditor so that he does not make one suffer, and

one's Rabbi so that he teaches him Torah and Mitzvot. And it is a great Mitzvah to flatter one's students and friends so that they learn and so that they accept one's words of rebuke and one's request to observe the Mitzvot. And also regarding any man whom one knows that if he rebukes him will become upset and will not listen to his words, only through flattering, it is a great Mitzvah then to flatter him in order to obtain a precious stone from the dirt.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12

### **HASHEM KNOWS YOUR INTENTIONS, DON'T LIE TO YOURSELF ANYMORE**

Hashem knows the thoughts and the hearts of men. "Hashem knows the thoughts of men for they are vanity" (Psalms 94) He knows the intentions you have when saying anything that comes out of your mouth. For you will always be able to rationalize the innocence of your motives in front of others or even worse you will be able to rationalize to yourself but Hashem knows your thoughts and whether you said something to hurt or to soothe, to give love or to hate, He knows the truth and if you try to fool Hashem, you are only fooling yourself. A sin brings in its wake another sin and soon you will be engulfed in so much lying and deception that you yourself will not know the truth anymore. So before it is impossible for you to break away from the prison you have put yourself in, cry to Hashem and ask him to let you find the way of truth for "Hashem is close to all those who call unto Him, those who call unto him in truth" (Psalms 145) and there is no bigger lie and dishonesty than lying to yourself.

Sefer Tikkun Brit ha Lashon

**THE ACCOUNT OF CREATION IS STAMPED  
WITH THE TRUTH SO YOUR MOUTH SHOULD  
ALSO SPEAK ONLY THE TRUTH**

And I heard from the mouth of my Teacher (Rabbi Moshe Cordovero ZTK'L) peace be upon him, that in the mouth there are 32 teeth that correspond to the 32 times the name ELOKIM is mentioned in the account of the creation (Maase Bereshit), and these correspond to the 32 paths of wisdom mentioned in Sefer Yetzira (which are 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and 10 Sefirot) And the account of Creation is stamped with the truth in its beginning and in its end. In the beginning it is written (Bereshit 1:1) BERESHIT BARA ELOKIM where the last letters of these 3 words make the letters ALEF MEM TAV [EMET-- TRUTH] and in the end of the account it is written (Bereshit 2:3) BARA ELOKIM LAASOT and the final letters of the 3 words make the word EMET, to teach you that all those who speak falsehood damage the work of Creation and the 32 paths of wisdom that are stamped with the quality of truth

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12

**THE ONE WHO TALKS LASHON HA RA  
DESERVES TO BE THROWN TO THE DOGS**

Rav Sheshet said in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria: "All those who tell LASHON HA RA and those who listen to LASHON HA RA and all those who give false testimony about their friend, they deserve to be thrown out to the dogs, as it is written (Shemot 22:30): "You shall throw them to the dog" and it says next: "Do not give a false testimony"

Talmud Sanhedrin 118a



**IT IS FORBIDDEN TO CURSE ONE'S WIFE  
FOR SHE IS HALF OF YOUR SELF**

And regarding the prohibition not to curse someone who is not listening, as the Targum translated the verse (Vayikra 19:14): "Do not curse the deaf" and the Targum says: "Do not curse the one who is not listening"...And it is also appropriate not to curse one's wife for the male is half of the body and the two together are considered one complete body, and if he curses her he will be cursing himself.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12

**THE ONES WHO TALK LASHON HA RA  
TRANSGRESS THE PROHIBITION OF NOT  
MENTIONING THE NAMES OF OTHER G-DS**

And it seems to me that regarding all those types of speakers of LASHON HA RA there is a verse that gives a warning to them all (Shemot 23:13) "And the name of other G-ds you shall not mention" And all those who blemish the Tongue belong to the side of the other forces which are called other G-ds, and therefore King David said (Psalms 34:14) "NETZOR LESHONECHA ME RA [Guard your tongue from evil] meaning all the things that have a tendency to RA [Evil] which is SAMA-EL, and whoever guards his tongue will merit the life and the good as it says (Psalms 34:14) : "Who is the man that desires life?..

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12

### **THE ONES WHO SWEAR IN VAIN DESECRATE THE NAME OF G-D**

And in the Tikkune Zohar (118a) they said regarding the gravity of the sin of swearing: “And the others who let from their mouth breaths of swearing, about them it is written “For many CHALALLIM [Dead bodies] They have thrown down” they are called CHALLALIM for they MECHALEL [Desecrate] the name of Hashem and they let the breath from their mouth, and also the voice and the words to the side of falsehood, and the swearing to the side of falsehood. And they mention the name of Hashem in vain and in falsehood, and through that name that they let out of their mouth in vain and in falsehood, they build for themselves buildings that drive them out of the world, this is what is written (Jeremiah 2:30): “In vain I have smitten your sons” Woe to those men who let out of their mouth words and promises of falsehood, It would have been good for them not to come to the world. All the friends stood up and said: “The merciful save us, The merciful save us”

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 12

### **DEATH COMES WHEN YOU SWEAR IN VAIN**

Rabbi Natan says: Through the sin of swearing in vain one's wife perishes...Rabbi says: Through the sin of swearing in vain sons die when they are still young...

Talmud Shabbat 32b

**THE ONES WHO PROMISE AND DO NOT  
FULFILL THEIR PROMISE COME TO COMMIT  
THE GRAVEST SINS**

Rav Shmuel bar Rav Itzhak said: All those who promise and do not fulfill their promise cause themselves to come to sin, idolatry, forbidden relations and spilling of blood, and we learn them all from Yaakov. Idolatry as it is written (Bereshit 34:2): "Abandon the idols that are among you". Forbidden relations as it is written (Bereshit 34:13) "Who has contaminated Dina your sister". Spilling of blood as it is written (Bereshit 35:25) "And the two sons of Yaakov took...". And also LASHON HA RA as it is written (Bereshit 31:1): "And he heard the words of the sons of Laban"...

Midrash Kohelet Rabba 5:4

**THE SERPENT RESPONDS THAT THE  
SPEAKERS OF LASHON HA RA ARE  
WORSE THAN HIM**

R. Samuel b. Nachmani observed: The serpent was asked: 'Why are you generally to be found among fences?' He replied: 'Because I made a breach in the fence of the world.' R. Shimon b. Yochai learned: The serpent was the first to make a breach in the world's fence, and so he has become the executioner of all who make breaches in fences.

The serpent was asked: 'Why do you bite? What do you gain thereby? The lion tears his prey and eats it, but you simply bite and kill!' He answered: 'Does the serpent bite without a whisper (Eccl. 10, 2)?" Is it conceivable that I should do anything unless instructions were given me from on high?'

He was asked: 'How is it that you bite into one limb and your poison travels to all the limbs?' He answered: "Do you say this to me? The master of the tongue has no advantage" (Ecclesiastes), for he can dwell in Rome and slay in Syria, or dwell in Syria and slay in Rome."

VAYIKRA RABBA 26:2

### **THE SPEAKER OF LASHON HA RA IS LIKE A SERPENT IN ALL RESPECTS**

We see then the speaker of LASHON HA RA resembles a serpent in all aspects, and he descends to the place of the KELIPOT and breaks the fences of the Keddusha and he lets the forces of evil enter.

Sefer Reshit Chochma Shaar ha Keddusha Perek 11

### **THE SLANDERER KILLS THREE PEOPLE AT ONCE**

Why is a slanderer called 'third'?' Because he kills three, viz. the one who utters it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is spoken. An incident is related of a man who had a wicked daughter-in-law who was addicted to slander. He used to plead with her twice a day, once in the evening and once in the morning. He would say to her: 'I beg of you not to speak slander' What did she do? She went and told her husband: 'This father of yours wants to cohabit with me; and if you do not believe me come in at night and you will find him sitting and soliciting me.' He went and lay in wait for him and saw him leaning over her and conversing with her. 'The thing,'

he said, 'is true then' What did he do? He struck his father and killed him. He was brought to justice and was sentenced to death. That woman also, who had spoken slander about his father, was brought to justice and sentenced to death. Thus it happened that the tongue killed the three of them.

VAYIKRA RABBA 26:2

*R' Shimon Bar Yochai said: Of everything is the Holy One, Blessed is He, forgiving except LASHON HA RA.  
Zohar ha Kaddosh Parashat Shelach 161*

*And if you see a man that occupies himself with LASHON HARA know that he has spilled lots of blood  
Sefer Shevet Mussar 10:32*

## CHAPTER 9

### SELECTIONS FROM THE PELE YOETZ, CHOVOT HA LEVAVOT MESILAT YESHARIM AND OTHER WORKS OF MUSSAR

#### GREAT IS THE EVIL DONE WHEN YOU SPEAK ABOUT A FAMILY OR ABOUT A WHOLE GROUP OF JEWS

...Great is the evil caused by speaking detrimentally about a family, a city or an entire segment of Israel, such as Sephardim speaking against Ashkenazim or the reverse.

The Holy One blessed-be-He is very strict with those who malign Jews. There is no city, family or tribe where chaff is not mixed with the wheat. No one is perfect but G-d.

Do not defame an entire family or city because of a few who have done something wrong. The punishment for vilifying a group is even greater than that for slandering an individual.

PELE YOETZ (LASHON HA RA)

#### HE WHO EMBARRASSES SOMEONE IN PUBLIC HAS NO SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME

"One who embarrasses another in public has no place in the World to Come" (Bava Metzia 59a). "It is better to throw yourself into a furnace than to shame someone in public" (Berachot 43b).

Unfortunately, many people curse one another, mention each other's faults, dredge up past hurts and even add untrue insults when embroiled in an argument. This violates the prohibition against ruining another's reputation and causes the person's face to blanch with shame. Doing so is akin to murder, and the shamer often does not even realize he has sinned, reasoning, "What's the difference? I only told the truth!"

Sometimes, someone embarrasses his friend unwittingly. He may, for example, be discussing faults and bad deeds in a group without directing his remarks against any one individual. Nevertheless, someone there with these faults may feel personally shamed. Silence is therefore best; you cannot escape sin if you talk too much.

PELE YOETZ HALBANA

### **BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO SHOW DISRESPECT TO OTHERS**

Be exceedingly careful never to show disrespect or scorn to anyone. Carefully weigh all your words and actions, imagining how you would feel if someone said or did the same to you. Our Rabbis taught: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend" (Shabbat 31a).

### **NEVER OBTAIN BENEFIT AT THE EXPENSE OF SOMEONE ELSE'S HONOR**

Do not strive to obtain rewards, honor, or pleasure at the expense of another's honor. Some foolish people take pleasure in ridiculing others, thinking they are doing a good deed by

making people laugh. Woe unto them! They are in fact angering G-d.

Rabbinic scholars in particular should be careful not to show disrespect to others, and should guard their tongues even if insulted. This is especially true in the presence of laymen, where disrespect among scholars desecrates G-d's Name.

**NO ONE IS BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE  
DO NOT DISRESPECT YOURSELF BY DOING  
THINGS WHICH DO NOT BEFIT YOU**

Do not belittle the honor of any creature. Do not be disrespectful to your wife or even your servant. Ultimately, no one is better than anyone else. Do not even be disrespectful to yourself by doing things which are beneath your dignity.

The Torah was considerate of people's honor. An old person is exempted from returning a lost object if this would belittle his honor. Scholars and leaders should insist on receiving their due respect.

People should associate with their equals. But when it comes to learning Torah, you should associate with all people, great and small. And when it comes to performing mitzvot, you should perform them yourself rather than asking someone to do them for you. This is the proper path to pursue, bringing glory from both G-d and man.

**PELE YOETZ ZILZUL**



**THE EVIL INCLINATION STILL DANCES  
AMONG US AND INCITES US TO  
HATE OUR FELLOW JEWS**

**LOVING** your friends is a great principle of the Torah. "Do not do unto others that which is hateful to you" (Shabbat 31 a). The evil inclination attempts to incite hatred between people. Because of the sin of baseless hatred Jerusalem was destroyed, our Temple was laid waste and we were exiled from our Land. The evil inclination continues to dance among us to this day, causing people to look out for themselves at the expense of others.

Some people rejoice in the misfortunes of others, while others exploit their friends for even the smallest benefit. Woe unto the eyes who see this! We yearn for redemption but no savior will come as long as this evil exists among us. We must therefore strive to increase love among our people.

**DO NOT SPEAK ABOUT SOMEONE IN A  
MANNER THAT YOU WOULD NOT LIKE  
SOMEONE TO SPEAK ABOUT YOU**

Do not speak to or about another person in a manner in which you would not like someone to speak to or about you. Avoid harming anyone, being especially careful not to cause anyone a financial loss. Not in vain did our Sages teach that a man is known by his purse (Eruvin 65b).

Contemplate deeply on this matter, for the evil inclination finds many ways to help a person rationalize his behavior.

The mitzvah of loving your neighbor must be fulfilled both in word and deed. Strive to bring people joy with your words, for example, by bringing good tidings, offering helpful ideas, and consoling a friend in times of sorrow. Treat people as kindly, generously and compassionately as a father treats his children, for we are all children of one Parent.

A person naturally loves himself, his children and his family; but when it comes to helping others, his self-love predominates, especially if there is expense or trouble involved. Strive to overcome your evil inclination and imbue yourself with love for others.

How fortunate are the people of Israel! How many exertions they undergo and expenses they incur in order to perform good deeds! But some important mitzvot are ignored. Our Sages taught that you should run to perform a light mitzvah as you would to perform a serious one, since you do not know the ultimate reward for the mitzvot (Avot 2:1). The mitzvah of loving others should certainly be uppermost, since it embodies the love of mercy, the love of neighbors, and the love of peace...

**DO NOT REJOICE AT A FRIEND'S  
MISFORTUNES AND TREAT  
EVERYONE WITH LOVE**

Do not rejoice at a friend's misfortunes, Heaven forbid; rather, rejoice in his successes, commiserate in his times of difficulty and pray for him. Our Rabbis taught that the Almighty is joyful when people are happy and suffers when people—even evil people—suffer. It is fitting for us to emulate His ways. A person who is suffering cannot serve G-d fully. By alleviating

his pain you enable him to do more mitzvot, thereby bringing greater pleasure to our Creator.

You should rejoice when you see people doing G-d's will and feel profound anguish when they transgress. If you are somehow deficient in your service of G-d, do not wish others to follow your example.

King Solomon stated that "Hate stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions" (Proverbs 10:12). The causes of hatred among people are essentially foolish, the result of mean-spiritedness. Do not be vengeful. Consider people who wronged you as not being in control of themselves, and as being messengers of the All Merciful. Do not become jealous with the feeling that you are earning less because of someone else. Such an attitude reflects a lack of faith, since G-d provides income...

**A GENEROUS PERSON WHO JUDGES OTHERS  
WITH KINDNESS WILL BE JUDGED IN HEAVEN  
WITH KINDNESS AS WELL**

...Our Sages taught that hatred takes a person from this world (Avot 2:11). An effective method for eliminating hatred is the fulfillment of the Rabbinic dictum: "Judge all people favorably" (Avot 1:6). "A generous and forgiving person will be judged on High in a generous and forgiving fashion" (Yoma 23a). "According to the measure with which you judge, so will you be judged" (Megillah 12b). Scrutinize yourself rather than despising someone else for not following the proper path. Who can honestly say that he is doing everything that is required of him? Who can be so sure that he is really better than the person he is criticizing?

...The essence of love is contingent on your ability to empathize with your friend's situation. Treat others as you would want them to treat you.

PELE YOETZ AHAVAT REIM

### **EVEN A FOOL WHO KEEPS QUIET IS ACCOUNTED AS WISE**

Silence of speech: "Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said, 'I grew up all of my days among the Sages and I have found nothing better for oneself than silence' (Avos 1:17). And so said King Shelomo, may peace be upon him (Mishlei 17:28): 'Even a fool who keeps quiet is accounted wise.' The wise man says: 'When I speak, I will regret what I have said, and when I am silent, I will not regret it. And if I will regret silence once, I will regret speech many times.' And the wise man says: 'When I speak, it [my speech] rules over me, for if I speak wrongly of another, that speech rules over me and compels me to humble myself before him and beg his forgiveness. But when I do not speak, I rule over it by not emitting it and by concealing it.'

ORCHOT TZADDIKIM, GATE OF SILENCE

### **HASHEM IS TRUTH AND THERE IS NO FALSEHOOD ABOVE**

Truth: The soul is created from the place of the Holy Spirit, as it is written (Bereshis 2:7): "And He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life." It is hewn from a place of purity and created from the Celestial Radiance, from the Throne of Glory. And there is no falsehood above, in the place of the Holy of Holies,

but all is truth, as it is written (Yirmeyahu 10: 10): 'And Hashem G-d is truth.' I have found it written (Shemos 3:14): "I will be what I will be" [ehyeh asher ehyeh], and (Yirmeyahu 10:10): 'And Hashem G-d is truth; He is the Living G-d and the Eternal King.' Derive from this that G-d, the Holy One Blessed be He is truth; for the word ehyeh, whose gematria [numerical equivalent] is twenty-one, is found twenty-one times [twenty-one multiplied by twenty-one equals 441, the gematria of emet, truth]. And the gematria of the word ehyeh itself is twenty-one (so that ehyeh asher ehyeh, being understood as a compounding of ehyeh, would, in itself, give the same result). G-d made man to be just [see Koheles 7:29], and (Shabbat 55a): 'The seal of the Holy One Blessed be He is truth.' And it is written (Tehillim 101:7): "The speaker of falsehoods will not be established before My eyes." When one occupies himself with truth, falsehood does not cleave to truth.

ORCHOT TZADDIKIM, GATE OF TRUTH

### TRUTH CAN BE ATTAINED BY SECLUSION AND SOLITUDE

And where there is treachery and falsehood, it is as if His habitation is not in the heaven and the earth. One who merits reflecting upon these things, upon the soul's being hewn from the source of truth, will conduct all of his affairs in truth and will not bring falsehood into the place of the holiness of truth. This is the intent of (ibid. 145:18): "Hashem is close to all who call Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.' For the Holy One Blessed be He, who is truth, draws near to all who call upon

Him in truth. And what is meant by calling upon G-d in truth? Freeing one's heart of everything in the world and drawing near to the Holy One Blessed be He alone, so that one's intellect grows stronger in its cleaving to the Celestial Radiance, and one's mind yearns constantly for Him. One can attain to this only by secluding himself within his room; and for this reason all who would be saintly should cultivate separation and seclusion, and join the company of men only when there is great need to do so. But if one prays by moving his lips and face before the wall, thinking of his affairs, calling upon Him with his tongue - his heart occupied with household matters - or if he thinks to derive honor by virtue of his pleasant voice, to find favor in the eyes of men and be praised by them, then his Divine service is not true, and he is in the class of those about whom it is written (Yirmeyahu 12:2): "You are close in their mouths, but far from their reins."

**ORCHOT TZADDIKIM, GATE OF TRUTH**

**THE MITZVAH OF LOVING A FELLOW JEW  
INCLUDES SPEAKING FAVORABLY  
ABOUT HIM**

It is a mitzvah for every person to love every Jew, just as he loves himself, as it says, "Love your fellow like yourself." Hence, one must speak favorably of another and be considerate of his possessions just as one is concerned for one's own possessions and is zealous of one's own honor.

Rambam, Hilchot Dayot, 6:31

**WHEN YOU HEAR SOMETHING EVIL ABOUT  
ANOTHER JEW, EITHER THAT JEW IS WRONG  
OR THE PERSON WHO SAID IT IS WRONG SO  
THEREFORE ONE MUST BE GRIEVED**

When one hears something disparaging about another Jew, even a stranger, one should be sorely distressed, since somebody must be grievously at fault. If the derogatory account is true, then the subject is wrong. On the other hand, if it is false, then the talebearer is in an unenviable situation.

Sefer HaYom Yom, p. 112

**WHOEVER JUDGES ANOTHER ONE IS  
ACTUALLY RENDERING JUDGMENT  
ABOUT HIMSELF**

A tradition from the Baal Shem Tov: Whoever judges another, favorably or critically, is actually rendering judgment over himself. For example, if someone remarks that so-and-so's good deed or good words deserve G-d's blessings for his needs, or that so-and-so's misdeed or improper speech have earned him punishment, these very remarks are transposed into a verdict about himself, whether favorable or otherwise. Whoever rationalizes another's suffering instead of agonizing over it, and does not pray for the other's relief, then his own deeds and words are scrutinized [from Above]. By contrast, he who empathizes with his fellow's anguish and prays for him, he will be rewarded.

Sefer HaTamim 7, p. 104

**THE ONE WHO LOVES HIS FELLOW JEWS IS  
SPARED JUDGMENTS FROM ABOVE**

Rabbi Shlomo related the declaration of the Baal Shem Tov in one of his holy discourses: "I call as my witness Heaven and Earth [to attest to the following] The Heavenly Court was adjudicating a case involving a man against whom was laid a serious charge. This man was so simple that he only knew how to pray and recite Tehillim. He was exceptional, however, in his love of a fellow Jew, with all the faculties of his soul. In thought, always thinking thoughts of love of a fellow Jew; in speech, speaking of love of a fellow Jew; in deed, benefiting everyone to the best of his ability, sharing the sorrow of every Jew, man or woman, and rejoicing in their joy. The verdict handed down by the Heavenly Court was that this man was to be granted a place among the righteous scholars whom our Sages said were lovers of Israel."

The sigh of a Jew over the suffering of another Jew breaks all the barriers erected by the Accusers. The joy and goodwill that one feels, and the blessings that one gives, on account of another's happiness, is as pleasant to G-d as the prayer of Rabbi Yishmael, The High Priest in the holy of holies.

Sefer ha Sichot 5703 p. 161

**NO CREATURE CAN HELP YOU OR HARM YOU  
WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE CREATOR**

So too, if a person realizes that not one of the created things can help him or harm him, except with the permission of the Creator, may He be exalted, he will turn his heart away from fear of them or hope in them, and will trust in the Creator



alone, as it says: "Trust not in rulers, in a human being, in whom there is no deliverance" (Tehillim 146:3).

The Duties of the heart: Trust in G-d. Chapter 3

### REPENTANCE IS DIFFICULT FOR THE ONE ACCUSTOMED TO SPEAKING LASHON HA RA

Repentance is difficult for one who has grown accustomed to speaking lies, slander, and gossip. He cannot keep track of it all, there is so much of it. It seems endless to him, and he forgets which people he has slandered. Meanwhile, it is all held against him and recorded in the book of his demerits.

Of him it was said: 'if one [of them] comes to see [me], he utters empty words, while his heart harbors evil; when he goes out, he gossips" (Tehillim 41:7); 'If you see a thief, you befriend him; [you keep company with adulterers. Your mouth you release for evil, and your tongue you cleave to deceit. You sit and slander your brother; you malign the son of your mother]" (ibid. 50:18-20). [The latter passage] equates gossiping with stealing and adultery! It also says, '[For they are all adulterers]...Every one mocks his neighbor" (Yirm 9:1-4).

The Duties of the heart The Gate of Repentance: Chapter 9

### YOU SHOULD REFLECT ON THE VIRTUES OF SOLITUDE AND THE PERILS OF BEING WITH OTHER PEOPLE

When a person's soul longs for the company and camaraderie of other people, he should reflect on the virtues of Solitude and separation from others, and on the ill effect of associating with fools when this is not absolutely necessary. Among the ill

effects of companionship with them is needless talk, 'He said' and "It has been said" and other long-winded, superfluous babbling. The Wise One said, 'When there is too much talk, mistakes are not lacking; but he who restrains his lips is prudent' (Mishlei 10:19). A sage once said, 'Withhold your extraneous words and muzzle your extraneous speech.' Further [ill effects] are gossip, slander, and deprecation. Scripture says of [one with] such habits, 'You sit and slander your brother; you malign the son of your mother' (Ps 50:20)...

### **WHEN YOU ARE WITH OTHER PEOPLE THERE ARE FALSEHOOD AND LIES**

Further [ill effects] are falsehood and lies. Of this it says, "Falsehood is in its midst" (ibid. 55:12); 'I gave heed and listened: they speak untruth' (Yirmeyahu 8:6). Further [ill effects] are false and trivial oaths, of which the Creator has said: "G-d will not allow it to go unpunished" (Shemos 20:7). A pious man once said to his disciples, "The Torah has permitted us to swear truthfully in G-d's Name; but I advise you not to swear by His Name [at all], either truthfully or falsely. Just say, 'it is so,' or 'it is not so.'" Further [ill effects of associating with fools] are arrogance and scorn, ridiculing part of those who are present, and scoffing with them. I have devoted one of the gates of this book to countering such traits - the Gate of Humility...

### **THERE'S ABSENCE OF FEAR OF G-D**

[Among the ill effects of their company is] also the absence of fear of G-d in one's heart when mingling with people and talking with them, coupled with the near impossibility of

escaping monetary loss at their hands and becoming the object of their slander. Further ill effects are currying favor and love of fame, being proud before others and wishing to appear great in their eyes with respect to what one knows and does not know of various fields of knowledge and deeds.

The Duties of the heart, Gate of Self-Accounting. Chapter 3

### **MOVING YOUR TONGUE SHOULD BE FOR YOU AS HARD FOR YOU AS MOVING A BIG ROCK**

You should endeavor to restrain your senses and the motions of your external limbs, as I will now describe to you. Refrain from idle words, so that moving your heaviest limb seems easier to you than moving your tongue, For the part of the body that is quickest to sin and its sins are more numerous than those of all the rest, because of its swiftness and quick motion because of the ease with which its deed is done, and because of its ability to do good or evil without any intermediary. It is therefore your duty, my brother, to endeavor to curb and control it. Do not allow it any speech unless absolutely necessary for your religious or secular needs. Curtail superfluous speech as much as you can. Perhaps you will escape its injury. As the Wise One said: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Mishle 18:21)...

### **CONTROLLING THE TONGUE IS HARDER THAN CONTROLLING ANY OTHER LIMB**

Begin with [the tongue], before the other senses and members, because it is more difficult [to control] than the others. As David, peace be upon him, said: "Who is the man who desires

life, who yearns to see good in his days? Guard your tongue from evil, your lips from deceitful talk' (Tehillim 34:13-14). The exhortations in our [holy] books to limit speech are no secret; they are numerous and prominent.

If you should wish to corroborate what I have said about the many sins involved in speech, undertake to remember the words that left your mouth during the day, when you were together with other people and mingling with them. If you can write it all down, do so. Later, at night, when you are not preoccupied with your affairs, go over your words...

The Duties of the heart, The Gate of Abstinence. Chapter 5

**IF YOU RECTIFY YOURSELF ALONE YOUR  
PROFIT IS SMALL, IF YOU RECTIFY OTHERS  
YOUR MERIT WILL BE LARGE**

My brother, if one rectifies himself alone, his merit will be little; but if one rectifies himself and many others as well, his merit will be multiplied by the merits of every person he has rectified for [the service of G-d. As our Masters, of blessed memory, said: "Whoever leads many people to virtue, no sin occurs through him .... Moshe was virtuous and led many people to virtue - the people's virtue is attributed to him, as it says (Devarim 33:21): 'He executed G-d's justice, and His laws with Israel'" (Avos 5:18). The Wise One said, "For those who reprove there will be delight, and a good blessing will come upon them" (Mishlei 24:25). And it says: 'True instruction was in his mouth ... and he turned many back from iniquity" (Malachi 2:6); 'And those who turn the many to righteousness [shall shine] like the stars, for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

The Creator has therefore commanded us to reprove those who fall short in the fulfillment of their duties, as it says: "You must reprove your fellow" (Vayikra 19:17). Our Masters, of blessed memory, said (see Arachin 16b): 'Until what point is [the obligation of reproof Rav said, 'Until one is cursed.' Shemuel said, 'Until one is stricken.'" And it says, "He who admonishes a man to [serve] Me will find favor" (Mishlei 28:23).

The Duties of the heart, The Gate of Love of G-d Chapter 6

**SELECTIONS FROM THE BOOK THE PATH OF  
THE JUST AUTHORED BY RABBI MOSHE  
CHAYYIM LUZZATO ZTK'L**

**LAUGHTER AND LEVITY ARE VERY SEVERE  
AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESCAPE FROM THEM**

Laughter and levity are very severe. He who is immersed in it is as one who is immersed in a great ocean, from which it is extremely difficult to escape. For laughter affects a person's heart in such a manner that sense and reason no longer prevail in him, so that he becomes like a drunkard or a simpleton, whom, because they cannot accept direction, it is impossible to advise or direct. As was said by King Solomon, may Peace be upon him (Ecclesiastes 2:2), "About laughter I have said, 'It is silly,' and about happiness, 'What does it do?'" And our Sages of blessed memory have said (Avoth 3.13), "Laughter and lightheartedness motivate a man towards illicit relations." For even though every reasoning individual recognizes the gravity of this kind of sin and his heart is afraid to approach it because

of the vividness of the impression that has stamped itself into his mind, of the truly terrible nature of the offense and the severity of its punishment, still laughter and lightheartedness draw him on little by little and lead him closer and closer to the stage where fear leaves him little by little, degree by degree, until finally he reaches the sin itself and commits it. Why is this so? Just as the essence of Watchfulness involves applying one's heart to things, so the essence of laughter is the turning away of one's heart from just, attentive thinking, so that thoughts of fearing G-d do not enter one's heart at all.

#### **WITH A LITTLE LEVITY ONE REMOVES FROM HIM MANY REBUKES AND THE FEAR OF G-D**

Consider the great severity and destructive power of levity. Like a shield smeared with oil, which wards off arrows and causes them to fall to the ground, not permitting them to reach the bearer's body, is levity in the face of reproof and rebuke. For with one bit of levity and with a little laughter a person can cast from himself the great majority of the awakenings and impressions that a man's heart stimulates and effects within itself upon his seeing or hearing things which arouse him to an accenting and an examination of his deeds. The force of levity flings everything to the ground so that no impression whatsoever is made upon Him. This is due not to the weakness of the forces playing upon him, nor to any lack of understanding on his part, but to the power of levity, which obliterates all facets of moral evaluation and fear of G-d. Touching this the Prophet Isaiah "screamed like a crane," for

he saw that it was this which left no place for his exhortations to make an impression and which destroyed all hope for the sinners. As it is stated (Isaiah 28:22), "And now do not engage in levity lest your bonds be strengthened." ...

### ONE WHO IS GIVEN TO LEVITY BRINGS SUFFERING UPON HIMSELF

And our Sages have pronounced (Avodah Zarah 18b) that one who is given to levity brings suffering upon himself. Scripture itself explicitly states (Proverbs 19:29), "Judgments are appropriate for the light-headed." Indeed, this is dictated by reason; for one who is influenced by thought and studies does not require bodily punishment, for he will leave off sinning without it by virtue of the thoughts of repentance which will arise in his heart through what he will read or bear of moral judgments and exhortations. But the light-headed, who because of the force of their levity are not influenced by exhortations cannot be corrected except through punitive judgments. For their levity will not be as effective in warding off these as it is in warding off ethical appeals. In accordance with the severity of the sin and its consequences is the True Judge severe in His punishment. As our Sages of blessed memory have taught us (Avodah Zarah 18b), "The punishment for levity is extremely severe; it begins with suffering and ends with destruction, as it is said (Isaiah 28:22), 'Lest your bonds be strengthened, for I have heard destruction and cutting off . . .'"

**WE HAVE TO ASSOCIATE WITH PEOPLE THAT  
BEHAVE LIKE HUMAN BEINGS AND NOT WITH  
PEOPLE THAT BEHAVE LIKE ANIMALS**

The third deterrent to Watchfulness is evil companionship, that is, the companionship of fools and sinners, as Scripture states (Proverbs 13:20), "And the friend of fools will be broken." Very often we see that even after the truth of a man's responsibility for Divine service and Watchfulness has impressed itself upon a person, he weakens or commits certain trespasses in order not to be mocked by his friends or to be able to mix freely with them. This is the intent of Solomon's warning (Proverbs 24:21), "Do not mix with those who make changes." If someone says to you (Ketuvot 17a), "A man's mind should always be associated with his fellow men," tell him, "This refers to people who conduct themselves as human beings and not to people who conduct themselves as animals." Solomon again warns (Proverbs 14:7), "Withdraw yourself from a fool." And King David said in this connection (Psalms 1: 1), "Happy is the man who did not walk...", upon which our Sages of blessed memory have commented (Avodah Zarah 18b), "if he walked he will eventually stand, and if he stood, he will eventually sit." And again (Psalms 26:4), "I have not sat with false men ... I despised the society of the wicked ..." What a person must do, then, is to purify and cleanse himself, and keep his feet from the paths of the crowd who are immersed in the foolishness of the time, and turn them to the precincts of G-d and His dwelling places. As David himself concludes (Ibid. 6), "I will wash my hands in cleanliness, and I will go round Your altar, O G-d."



**IF THERE ARE THOSE WHO RIDICULE YOU  
FOR DOING G-D'S WILL YOU SHOULD  
RIDICULE THEM BACK AND NOT MOVE FROM  
THE RIGHT PATH**

If there are among his companions those who subject him to ridicule, he should not take it to heart, but, to the contrary, should ridicule them and shame them. Let him consider whether, if he had the opportunity of acquiring a great deal of money, he would keep from undertaking what such acquisition entailed so as to avoid the ridicule of his companions. How much more averse should he be to losing his soul for the sake of sparing himself ridicule. In this connection our Sages of blessed memory exhorted us (Avoth 5.23), "Be fierce as a leopard to do the will of your Father in heaven." And David said (Psalms 119:46), "And I will speak of your testimonies before kings and I will not be ashamed." Even though most of the kings of his time occupied themselves with, and were wont to converse upon grandiose schemes and pleasures, and we would, therefore, tend to expect that David, himself a king, would be ashamed, while in their presence, to speak of ethical questions and Torah instead of discussing great feats and the pleasures of men such as they - in spite of all this, David was not in the least perturbed, and his heart was not seduced by these vanities, because he had already attained to the truth. He states explicitly (Psalms 119:46), "And I will speak of your testimonies before kings and I will not be ashamed." Isaiah, likewise, said (Isaiah 50:7), "I therefore made my face like flint and I knew that I would not be ashamed."

Rabbi Moshe Chayyim Luzzato, Path of the Just, Chapter 5

**THE FORNICATION OF THE MOUTH AND THE  
EARS IS TO SPEAK OR LISTEN TO  
OBSCENE LANGUAGE**

Concerning the "fornication of the mouth and the ear," that is, speaking obscenities or listening to them, our Sages "screamed like cranes" (Yerushalmi Terumot 1.4), " 'Let there not be seen within you a thing of nakedness' (Deuteronomy 23:15) - nakedness of speech, the uttering of obscenities." And (Shabbat 33a), "Because of the sin of obscene speech, troubles renew themselves and the youth of Israel die, G-d forbid." And (Ibid.), "If one sullies his mouth, Gehinnom is deepened for him." And (Ibid.), "Everyone knows why a bride goes to the wedding canopy, but anyone who speaks obscenely concerning it, even a decree of seventy good years is converted to evil." And (Chagigah 5b), "Even a casual conversation between a man and his wife is held up to him at the time of Judgment." And concerning listening to obscenities they said (Shabbat 33a), 'Even one who listens and remains still, as it is said (Proverbs 22:14), 'He who has incurred G-d's wrath, shall fall therein.' "We see, then, that all of one's faculties must be clean of fornication and of anything related to it.

Rabbi Moshe Chayyim Luzzato, Path of the Just, Chapter 11

**THE UTTERING OF OBSCENITIES IS THE VERY  
NAKEDNESS OF THE FACULTY OF SPEECH**

If one would gain your ear and tell you that the Sages said what they did in relation to obscene speech only to frighten one and to draw him far from sin, and that their words apply only to hot-blooded individuals who, by speaking obscenities, would

be aroused to lust, but not to those who air them only in jest, in which case there is nothing whatever to fear- tell him that his words are those of the evil inclination; for the Sages have adduced an explicit verse in support of their statements (Isaiah 9:16): "Therefore G-d will not rejoice over their youths ... for they are all flatterers and speakers of evil, and every mouth utters obscenities." This verse mentions neither idol worship, nor illicit relations, nor murder, but flattery and slander and obscene utterance, all sins of the mouth in its capacity of speech; and it is because of these sins that the decree went forth, "Therefore G-d will not rejoice over their youths, and will not be merciful to their orphans and widows..." The truth, then, is as our Teachers of blessed memory have it, that the uttering of obscenities is the very "nakedness" of the faculty of speech and was prohibited as an aspect of fornication along with all other such aspects, which, although outside the realm of the act of illicit relations itself (as indicated by their not being subject to the punishment of "cutting off" or to the death penalty), are nonetheless prohibited in themselves; this aside from the fact that they also conduce to and bring about the principally proscribed act itself.

Rabbi Moshe Chayyim Luzzato, Path of the Just, Chapter 11

*"Even a casual conversation between a man and his wife is held up to him at the time of Judgment."  
(Chagigah 5b)*

## CHAPTER 10

### SELECTIONS FROM THE SEFER SHEMIRAT LASHON [GUARDING THE TONGUE]

**AUTHORED BY THE HOLY  
CHAFETZ CHAYYIM ZTK'L**

#### **THE AVERAGE PERSON CAN BREAK HIS HABIT OF SPEAKING LASHON HA RA**

In truth, there is no basis for the contention that the average person cannot avoid forbidden speech for more than a day or two. It is a proven fact that the longer one persists in guarding his tongue, the easier it becomes. One should not grow frustrated if, after he resolved to avoid forbidden speech, his evil inclination overpowered him and he spoke LASHON HA RA. Even if this happens time and again, nevertheless, he should not despair. Rather, he should forever strengthen himself to avoid improper speech, and persevere. This is how one should conduct himself his whole life.

This is the intention of the Talmud's statement, "One should forever arouse his good inclination to subdue his evil inclination" (Berachot 5a). Life is an ongoing battle with one's evil inclination. One must forever be ready for battle and never be discouraged by failure.

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, INTRODUCTION**

**YOU CAN NOT AVOID EVERYTHING BUT THAT  
DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU WILL NOT TRY**

"Do you really think that you can avoid everything that must not be said? Why, you are a man of the world, you have dealings with many people!" This was another argument cited above, which can lead a person to totally ignore the concept of Shemirat halashon. The Sefer Reshit Chochmah (Sha'ar HaAhavah ch. 54) relates that R' Moshe Cordovero' saw the author of Shushan Sodos in a dream [following the latter's passing], and he was shining like a torch. The deceased revealed that this was in merit of his having avoided idle chatter while on this world. Should such merit be totally forfeited because one feels that to acquire it in its entirety is out of reach?

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, INTRODUCTION**

**HASHEM JUDGES US IN THE SAME MANNER  
THAT WE JUDGE OTHERS AND IF YOU ARE  
COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS OTHERS  
HASHEM WILL BE COMPASSIONATE  
TOWARDS YOU**

The way in which one acts towards others determines the way in which Hashem will act towards him. For example, if one strives to overlook the hurt caused to him, and if he acts towards others with kindness and compassion, then he awakens the Attribute of Compassion in Heaven. Hashem will judge him with mercy and he will be given kindness from Above. As our Sages state: "Whoever has compassion towards

others will be shown compassion from Above" (Shabbat 151b); and "Whoever refrains from exacting his measure [of retribution from others for the wrong they caused him] will have all his sins forgiven" (Rosh Hashanah 17a). Moreover, in his merit, Divine compassion will manifest itself upon the Jewish people as a whole.

**IF YOU JUDGE OTHERS SEVERELY THEN THE  
ATTRIBUTE OF JUSTICE GAINS STRENGTH  
AND YOU WILL BE JUDGED  
SEVERELY FROM HEAVEN**

However, if it is one's way to be absolutely unrelenting towards others and to treat them without compassion, then he gives strength to the Attribute of justice -toward himself specifically, and to the entire Jewish nation as well. Heaven will be unrelenting regarding that person's sins, for "With the measure that a person measures do they [i.e. Heaven] measure him" (Megillah 12b).

**JERUSALEM WAS DESTROYED BECAUSE  
THEY WERE STRICT WITH ONE ANOTHER**

Our Sages state: "Jerusalem was destroyed only because its inhabitants limited their decisions to the [letter of the] law of Torah" (Bava Metzia 30b). This seems difficult, for Scripture records many sins of which that generation was guilty. Our discussion sheds light on the matter. Had the people overlooked the wrong caused them, then Hashem would have forgiven them as well. However, they were absolutely

unrelenting toward each other, demanding from one another whatever they could possibly extract according to the law -and Heaven judged them accordingly.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 2

### **THE FIRST SLANDER EVER SPOKEN WAS UTTERED BY THE SERPENT IN GAN EDEN**

The first slander ever spoken was uttered by the Serpent who, through cunning and deceit, prevailed upon Adam and Eve to partake of the Tree of Knowledge. "The serpent said to the woman, 'You will surely not die [by partaking of it]; for G-d knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like G-d, knowing good and bad'" (Bereshit 3:4-5). R' Yehoshua of Siknin said in R' Levi's name: "The serpent began speaking slander of his Creator, saying, 'He [G-d] ate of this tree and created this world. He therefore ordered you not to eat thereof so you will not create other worlds, for every craftsman hates his competitors'(Bereshit Rabbah 19:4).

### **THE RESULT OF THE SERPENT'S SLANDER WAS THE DECREE OF DEATH UPON MANKIND**

The result of this slander was the decree of death upon mankind. As for the serpent, it was punished according to its actions. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will pound your head, and you will bite his heel" (Bereshit 3:15). The serpent caused death, therefore man seeks to kill him. The serpent claimed that G-d felt threatened by man and had enmity for

him, therefore man hates the venomous serpent who seeks to do him harm.

### **THE GOSSIPMONGER LIKE THE SERPENT COMES TO BE DESPISED BY PEOPLE**

And so it is with the gossipmonger. As people become aware of his wicked nature, they come to loathe him and keep their distance from him, lest he find cause to speak evil of them. The serpent was cursed, "... upon your belly you shall go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life" (Bereishis 3:14). Similarly, the gossipmonger is punished with poverty, as stated in Sefer HaKaneh.'

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, PART 2 - BERESHIT**

**HASHEM DOES NOT FORGIVE THE  
SIN OF LASHON HA RA AND HE WHO SPEAKS  
LASHON HA RA GIVES POWER TO THE SATAN**  
Sifre states that Hashem, as it were, does not want to associate with gossipers and rescue them from troubles. The Holy Zohar states (Parashas Shelach): "R' Shimon said: Of everything is the Holy One, Blessed is He, forgiving - except for LASHON HA RA. " The reason for this is perfectly clear.

### **WHEN A JEW SPEAKS LASHON HA RA HE IS ACCUSING HIS FELLOW JEWS IN HEAVEN**

When a Jew speaks LASHON HA RA, he causes accusation in Heaven toward the Jewish people. In the words of the Zohar (Parashat Pekude), this sin "brings plague, sword and murder



to this world. Woe to those who awaken this evil force, who do not guard their tongues and pay no heed to this! They do not realize that the ways of Heaven are reflective of the ways on this world, both for good and for bad. [Through evil talk,] Satan is aroused to voice accusation against the entire world."...Hashem loves the Jewish people with a deep, unfathomable love.

**LASHON HA RA GIVES POWER TO THE SATAN  
TO ACCUSE ISRAEL AND THEN HASHEM  
RESPONDS TO THE ACCUSATION**

Of course, Hashem is well aware of all that transpires both in public and in private, as it is written, "Can a man hide in a hidden place so that I will not see him? says HASHEM?" (Yirmiyahu 23:24). Nevertheless, out of His great love for Israel, He is slow to anger and seeks to find merit for His nation, as it is written, "He gazes at no iniquity in Yaakov..." (Bamidbar 23:21; see Rashi). In His infinite wisdom, Hashem has decreed that His judgment of man reflect the intercessions and accusations of the Heavenly angels. When the Accuser [i.e. Satan] comes before Him to relate the sins of His people, then He feels compelled, as it were, to respond. And it is those who speak LASHON HA RA who cause the SATAN to speak against the Jewish people.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 2

**WOULD YOU GO IN FRONT OF HASHEM TO  
ACCUSE THE JEWS? THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS  
IF YOU TALK LASHON HA RA**

Picture this: A Jew is ordered to enter the Temple of G-d, stand before the Holy Ark and accuse his fellow Jews of whatever sins he knows them to be guilty of. Without a doubt, even the lowest among us would endanger his life rather than carry out this dreadful order.

Yet people fail to realize that this is exactly what they are doing when they speak LASHON HA RA. As stated in Tanna D'Ve Eliyahu (1, 18:64): "When the wicked speak LASHON HA RA, it ascends before the Throne of Glory..." It is therefore not difficult to understand the gravity of this sin, and the heavy price that the speaker is liable to pay, both in this world and the next. Therefore, David cautions us that if we seek to enjoy the bliss of eternal life in the next world and desire good days in this world, our first step must be to guard our tongues....

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 2

**WHEN YOU TALK LASHON HA RA ABOUT  
SOMEONE, HIS SINS BECOME YOUR SINS AND  
YOUR MITZVOT ARE CREDITED TO HIM**

It's written in Chovot HaLevavot (Shaar HaKeniah, ch. 7)

"On the Day of judgment, many people will find themselves credited with meritorious deeds which they did not do. "These are not mine" each one will declare. He will be told, "These are the deeds of those who spoke disparagingly of you [and thereby caused their merits to be transferred to your account]." And

the one who spoke disparagingly will be told, "These deeds were taken from you when you spoke against So-and-so." Conversely, some will find acts of guilt on their account which they never committed. When each one will protest, "These are not mine!" he will be told, "These were taken from the account of So-and-so, against whom you spoke..."

**IN ORDER TO HAVE ETERNAL LIFE AS  
REWARD FOR YOUR MITZVOT AVOID  
LASHON HA RA**

Rabbi Rapahael Hamburger ZTK'L explains: "A person may spend a day or two earning for himself eternal life through Torah and Mitzvot, only to exchange these merits for his neighbor's sins by speaking against him. A few more days might go by as he accrues more reward, only to lose it all in the same manner when another opportunity for evil talk comes his way. This pattern might continue until his day of death, when he departs this world stripped of all his "possessions," that is, the Torah and Mitzvot in which he invested much time and effort. Therefore, David first exhorts us, "Guard your tongue from evil," and only then does he say, "Turn from evil and do good." The way to ensure that the reward of mitzvah observance remains ours for all eternity is by refraining from speaking ill of our fellow Jew.

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA 3**

**THROUGH LASHON HA RA YOU CAN LOOSE  
THE TORAH YOU HAVE WITH YOU**

Speaking LASHON HA RA can cause the great merit of one's Torah study to be forfeited. In the words of Midrash Shochar

**Tov (Tehillim ch. 52): Let not your mouth bring guilt on your flesh, and do not tell the emissary that it was an error. Why should G-d be angered by your speech and destroy the work of your hands? (Kohelet 5:5). Let not your mouth bring guilt on your flesh -by speaking LASHON HA RA. Why should G-d be angered by your speech and destroy the work of your hands? - for you will lose the little Torah which you have to your credit. SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 2**

**THE FATE OF THE JEWS IN THE DESERT WAS SEALED WHEN THEY SPOKE LASHON HA RA ABOUT THE LAND OF ISRAEL**

**Sifre states With ten trials did our ancestors test [G-d in the Wilderness], but their judgment was sealed only on account of the sin of LASHON HA RA, as it is written, "They have tested Me these ten times and did not heed My voice" (Bamidbar 14:22) [This is after the spies spoke slanderous words about the Land of Israel], and it is written, "You have made HASHEM weary [i.e. unrelenting] with your words" (Malachi 2:17)... SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 4**

**LASHON HA RA CAUSES THE PRESENCE OF HASHEM TO BE REMOVED FROM THIS WORLD**

**The sin of LASHON HA RA causes the Shechinah (Divine Presence) to remove itself from our midst. The Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 5:10) states:**

**R' Mona said: Whoever speaks LASHON HA RA causes the Shechinah to go up from this world. As David said: "My soul is among lions, I lie with men who are aflame, people whose teeth are spears and arrows, and whose tongue is a sharp sword. Be exalted above the heavens, O G-d, above all the earth be Your glory" (Tehillim 57:5-6). David's intent was: "Master of the Universe: Why is Your Presence manifest on this world [when such sinners are present]? Remove it to Your heavenly abode."**

**REGARDING THE GOSSIPER HASHEM SAYS:  
HE AND I CAN NOT DWELL IN THIS WORLD**

**Regarding the gossip Hashem say: "He and I cannot dwell together in this world" (Arachin 15b). Furthermore, the second Destruction occurred because of the gossipers who caused sinat chinam (baseless hatred) to reign among the people (Yoma 9b).**

**ONE WHO CAUSES STRIFE AMONG FRIENDS IS  
DESPICABLE IN THE EYES OF HASHEM**

**One who causes strife among friends is despicable in the eyes of Hashem, and his sin is too great to bear. King Salomon said: "Six things are hated by HASHEM, and the seventh is despised by Him. Haughty eyes, a tongue of falsehood, hands which shed innocent blood... and one who incites quarrels among brothers" (Mishlei 6:1619). Our Sages state that the seventh sin is the worst of all.'**

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 4**

**THE SPEAKER OF LASHON HA RA DENIES THE  
EXISTENCE OF G-D FOR HE WAITS TO SEE IF  
NOBODY IS WATCHING AND THEN  
HE TELLS HIS STORY**

**R' Yochanan said in the name of R' Yose ben Zimra: Whoever speaks LASHON HA RA is considered as if he had denied the existence of G-d, as it is written, (Tehillim 12:5), "Those who have said, 'With our tongues we shall prevail, our lips are with us, who is master over us?'" (Arachin 15b). Sefer Yereim explains that when someone wants to speak LASHON HA RA, he first casts a glance in all directions to make sure that the subject of his evil words is not present. His seeming lack of concern that his words will be heard above conveys an impression that, to his mind, Heaven is not cognizant of what he is about to say. This is why speaking LASHON HA RA is akin to denial of belief in G-d.**

**THE ONLY WAY OUT IS TO ENGAGE THE  
YETZER HA RA IN BATTLE**

**What more can be said concerning the severity of speaking LASHON HA RA? There is no solution but to engage the evil inclination in battle, so that one will not become caught in the net of this bitter sin. Those who will emerge victorious will reap the inestimable fruits of their efforts, both in this world and the next.**

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 4**

**THE METZORA [LEPER] ASKS OTHERS TO  
PRAY FOR HIMSELF BECAUSE HIS OWN  
PRAYER IS NOT HEARD ANYMORE BECAUSE  
OF THE SIN OF LASHON HA RA**

The Holy Zohar (Parashas Metzora 53) states:

The prayer of one who speaks LASHON HA RA will not come before the Holy One, Blessed is He, for a ruach tame (impure spirit) hovers over it. When he repents, and [sincerely] accepts upon himself the [various aspects of repentance, then what is written of him? "On the day of his purification, he shall be brought before the Kohen" (Vayikra 14:2).'

The above further clarifies the Torah's instruction that the Metzora (one who is afflicted with tzaraas for having spoken LASHON HA RA) call out to those who pass by, "[I am] contaminated, contaminated?" (ibid. 13:45) so that they will pray for him. Since his own prayers will not be accepted above, the Torah therefore advises him to request that others pray on his behalf.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 7

**THE REWARDS OF NOT SPEAKING LASHON  
HA RA IN THIS WORLD AND IN THE NEXT**

The Holy Zohar states (Parashat Chukat) that one who is zealous in avoiding forbidden speech becomes enveloped in a spirit of sanctity. Midrash Tanchuma (Tehillim 52:2) states: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, said: 'If you seek to escape [the punishments of Gehinnom, distance yourselves from LASHON

**HA RA. Through this, you will be deemed meritorious in this world and the next.' "**

**SEF. SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 10**

**IF YOU AVOID LASHON HA RA YOU ACHIEVE  
PEACE AND ARE LOVED BY EVERYONE**

**Through guarding the tongue one is blessed with the precious quality of peace. By refraining from speaking ill of others, one ensures that he will not be the object of their enmity; to the contrary, others will love him and confide in him, and surely will not speak ill about him. "Peace is precious, for in its merit, G-d does not allow the Satan to harm the Jewish people, even when idolatry is found among them (Bamidbar Rabbah 11:16)"**

**SEF. SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 11**

**THE SUFFERINGS OF POVERTY TAKE AWAY  
THE ARROGANCE THE SPEAKER OF LASHON  
HA RA FORMERLY HAD**

**How it is that in our days those who habitually speak LASHON HA RA are not afflicted with Tzaraat [A KIND OF LEPROSY]. An answer to this is found in Sefer Davar Kedushah, who cites Sefer HaKaneh:**

**The sufferings of poverty take the place of Tzaraat, for by being dependent upon others for survival, the poor man becomes rid of any arrogance - a prime cause of LASHON HA RA.' Moreover, the poor man is actually afraid to speak disparagingly of others, lest they learn of his remarks and cease to assist him. Tikkunei Zohar, as well, states that this sin**



can lead to poverty. Therefore, one who seeks to avoid material strain should be zealous in shmirat halashon.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA ZECHIRA, 6

### THE WORST PUNISHMENTS AWAIT THOSE WHO ENGAGE IN LASHON HA RA

R' Yehoshua ben Levi said: Whoever relates LASHON HA RA accumulates sins which reach the heavens, as it is written (Tehillim 73:9), "They direct their mouths to the heavens, their tongue struts on earth" (Arachin 15b). As previously mentioned the sin of LASHON HA RA can result in an accumulation of sins greater than the Three Cardinal Sins. This refers not only to the sins' severity, but to their punishment as well.

As The Talmud Yerushalmi states (Peah 1:1) , "There are four sins for which retribution is exacted in this world while the principal [i.e. primary punishment] remains for the World to Come: idol worship, immorality, murder - and LASHON HA RA is equal to them all."

In Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu (I, ch. 15) we read: "Those who strike their fellow stealthily [through LASHON HA RA] those who desecrate the Name in public, those who belittle their neighbors with words, and those who incite strife, their end will be that of Korach; regarding them does the Torah state: 'The earth covered them over [and they were lost from among the congregation]' " (Bamidbar 16:33).

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, ZECHIRA 8

### **HE WHO REJECTS LASHON HA RA AS FALSE HAS GREAT MERIT ACCRUING TO HIM**

To reject LASHON HA RA as false is an incredibly great source of merit - especially if the subject of the report is respected as a man of spiritual stature. Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu (II, ch. 7) states:

It is said of Yeravam ben Yoash that he was a man who accorded the prophets honor. Therefore, those nations which the Holy One, Blessed is He, did not give over into the hands of Yehoshua bin Nun or David, King of Israel, He gave over into the hands of Yeravam ben Yoash, as it is written, "He [Yeravam] returned the borders of Israel from the approach to Chamas until the sea of Aravah..." (II Melachim 14:25). Why did Yeravam, who was an idol worshiper, merit this? Because he did not accept LASHON HA RA regarding the prophet Amos.'...At that moment [when he rejected the report against the prophet], G-d said, "Though the generation is guilty of idol worship and its leader is guilty of idol worship, nevertheless, the land which I promised to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov will be given over into his [Yeravam's] hands."

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, ZECHIRA 12

### **CAUSING ANOTHER TO SIN [BY TELLING HIM LASHON HA RA] IS WORSE THAN KILLING HIM**

Our Sages speak harshly of a sinner who causes others to sin. "Causing another to sin is worse than killing him. For by killing him, one denies him this world, but by causing him to sin, one denies him both this world and the next" (Sifre,

Devarim 23:8). Thus, to relate forbidden information and cause another to listen to and accept LASHON HA RA is to commit a most serious offense [aside from the transgression of numerous Scriptural laws for speaking the forbidden'].

### **THE EXPERT GOSSIPMONGER CAUSES MANY TO SIN AT ONCE**

Our Sages teach: "LASHON HA RA kills three: the speaker, the listener, and the person being discussed" (Yerushalmi Pe'ah 1:1). A gossipmonger causes many to sin all at once, for it is his way to assemble a crowd around himself to hear his latest piece of gossip. The gossipmonger is deft in the art of making his reports intriguing and convincing, so that his listeners accept his words as fact and, in most cases, spread the news to others. Moreover, those who take pleasure in listening to gossip often adopt the ways of the gossipmonger, as they spread gossip, both new and old, to others.

### **THE DEPTH OF THE GOSSIPMONGER SIN CAN NOT BE DESCRIBED**

Words cannot adequately depict the depth of the gossipmonger's sin. His words bring untold harm to himself and to all those who accept and relate LASHON HA RA because of him. His crime is often compounded as he spices his words with mockery and lies, which even if not disparaging are nonetheless forbidden. The Mishnah states: "Scripture punishes one who joins transgressors like the transgressors themselves" (Mishnah Makkos 1:7). Surely whoever willingly joins the gossipmonger's group will stand judgment for this,

and will be inscribed above as belonging to a "fraternity of wickedness" (Tzavaas R' Eliezer 7).

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, ZECHIRA 13

**THE RECTIFICATION OF THE SIN OF LASHON  
HA RA IS THROUGH THE TORAH AND BY  
MAKING OTHERS AWARE OF THE  
LAWS OF LASHON HA RA**

The Talmud states (Arachin 15b): "R' Chama bar Chanina said: If one has spoken LASHON HA RA, how can he rectify his sin? If he is a Torah scholar, he should toil in Torah study, as it is written, 'A healing for the tongue is a tree of life' (Mishlei 15:4) . Torah is the 'tree of life,' as it is written (ibid. 3:18), 'It is a tree of life to all who grasp it.' "

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (ibid. 18:21). Evil speech can deny one the eternal bliss of the Next World. One who seeks to heal his tongue of this terrible malady should partake of the tree of life that is Torah. At the same time, he must be on guard to avoid repeating past sins.

It is for the toil of Torah study that man was born. However, man has free choice to decide what the nature of his speech will be. If he will not use his natural inclination toward speech for the study of Torah, then inevitably he will speak other matters and will transgress the laws of forbidden speech.

When a Jew overcomes his evil inclination and fulfills the Divine will, a spirit of sanctity is drawn upon his soul. If a person sanctifies himself a little, they sanctify him a great deal.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, SHAAR HA TORAH 1

### **HOW DAMAGING IS STRIFE, IT DESTROYS EVERYTHING**

Sefer Ma'alot HaMiddot states (24):

How damaging is strife!...Our Sages state (Derech Eretz Zuta ch. 9): "A home in which there is strife will ultimately be destroyed; a synagogue in which there is strife will see its congregants dispersed, and ultimately will be made desolate; a city in which there is strife will become a place of bloodshed. Two Torah scholars in a single city or two rabbinical courts in a single city who feud with one another - their end will be death. Moreover, strife between rabbinical courts brings destruction to the world.

### **WHEN ONE IS PART OF A STRIFE HASHEM BRINGS ABOUT HIS END**

The Midrash states (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:3): "Take heed of the severity of strife, for when one is an accomplice to strife, the Holy One, Blessed is He, brings about, his end, as it is written [regarding those who sided with Korach], 'A flame came forth from HASHEM and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense' " (Bamidbar 16:35).

### **THE ONE WHO AVOIDS QUARRELS IS VERY HONORABLE**

One who scrupulously avoids dispute is truly honored by others, as it is written, "it is an honor for a man to refrain from

quarreling" (Mishlei 20:3). The Midrash comments (Yalkut HaMechiri, Mishlei 26:14): If personal dignity demands that one refrain from becoming involved in personal feud, then certainly it demands that one avoid becoming entangled in someone else's feud! Of those who take the opposite path, Scripture states: "Like someone who grabs hold of a dog's ears is a passerby who becomes involved in a quarrel not his own" (Mishlei 26:17).'

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, ZECHIRA 11

### **BETTER TO BE PURSUED THAN TO PURSUE OTHERS**

Scripture states: "G-d always seeks the pursued" (Kohelet 3:15). The Midrash comments (Vayikra Rabbah 27:5):

R' Yose ben Nehurai said: The Holy One, Blessed is He, always exacts retribution from the pursuers for the blood of the pursued. R' Elazar said in the name of R' Yose ben Zimra: So it is with Temple offerings. G-d said: The ox is pursued by the lion, the goat by the leopard, the sheep by the wolf; do not bring offerings from the pursuers, but only from the pursued.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON

### **THE MYRIAD BENEFITS OF REMAINING SILENT**

R' Yitzchak said: Which craft should man pursue in this world He should make himself like a mute (Chullin 89a). By exercising verbal restraint, one is saved from many sins:

LASHON HA RA, flattery, mockery and lying. He is also saved from verbal attack. There are numerous inestimable benefits of developing the quality of silence. People confide their private matters to a person who is known to guard his tongue, for he can be trusted to keep such information to himself.

### DEATH AND LIFE ARE IN THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

..."Death and life are in the tongue's power" (Mishlei 18:21) . The tongue can cause harm in a way that the sword cannot. The sword can kill only through direct contact with its victim, while the tongue can bring about the ruination of someone who is miles away. Man was created with two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, but only one mouth, to indicate that he is obligated to limit his speech, for transgression through speech can occur quite easily, and with far-reaching consequences.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON

### AVOID GROUPS IF THEY ARE NOT CAREFUL ABOUT FORBIDDEN SPEECH

One should avoid association with a given group unless he knows that its members are careful to avoid forbidden speech. If circumstances demand such association, one should limit it to a minimum, and maintain silence whenever possible. Even one sinner can ruin an entire group and make it necessary to avoid being in its company.

**AVOID ASSOCIATING WITH GROUPS WHERE  
EVEN ONE OUT OF ONE HUNDRED  
IS A SCOFFER**

Sefer Rosh HaGivah writes:

Be alert, my son, regarding that which King Shlomo said: "In the ears of a fool do not speak, lest he disparage the wisdom of your words" (Mishlei 23:9). Beware of a gathering of one hundred men among whom is found even one scoffer or fool, and certainly if [one of the fools] is a wise man in his own eyes, for he is the quintessential fool ...' Strengthen yourself to sit in silence at such a gathering, do not discuss anything at all. Even if you will speak all sorts of wisdom, they [the scoffers and fools] will best you and grant you disgrace, as it is written, "Iniquity appears and disgrace follows" (ibid. 11:2).

If you wish to converse [at such a gathering] with a man like yourself, be careful that your words not reach their [the scoffers'] ears. Thus does Scripture advise: "In the ears of a fool do not speak," rather than, "Do not speak with a fool."

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON

**THE RESTRAIN NEEDED TO AVOID LASHON  
HA RA IS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN THE FIRST  
FEW WEEKS, THEREAFTER IT WILL BE EASY  
AS GOSSIPMONGERS WILL KNOW THAT YOU  
ARE NOT INTERESTED IN THEIR  
MERCHANDISE**

It is a proven fact that to restrain oneself from speaking and listening to LASHON HA RA is difficult for only the first few



weeks. As others come to realize that an individual will not speak or listen to LASHON HA RA, mockery or other forbidden speech, they will refrain from relating such talk to him, and will peddle their "wares" elsewhere. They will come to understand that such talk does not raise their esteem in this man's eyes; to the contrary, he considers them nothing more than gossipmongers and scorners. He will hardly have to guard himself from hearing LASHON HA RA, for the gossipmongers themselves will avoid telling their stories in his presence, lest he belittle their words before others who are present.

What is needed is an initial firm resolve to acquire this sacred quality. Regarding such spiritual striving do our Sages say, "One who reflects upon his ways in this world merits and sees salvation from the Holy One, Blessed is He" (Moed Katan 5a).

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON TEVUNAH 3

### HASHEM ASKS THE JEWS TO LOVE, HONOR AND RESPECT ONE ANOTHER

Tanna D'Vei Ehyahu Rabbah (ch. 28) states:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Israel: My beloved children! Is there anything I lack that I should have to ask of you? All I ask of you is that you love one another, that you honor one another, that you respect one another. In this way, no sin, robbery, or base deed will be found among you, so that you will remain undefiled forever. Thus it is written, "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what HASHEM seeks of you - only the doing of justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with HASHEM, your G-d" (Michah 6:8).

### **LOVE YOUR FELLOW AND DON'T TAKE REVENGE**

If it happens that one's fellow acted improperly towards him, one must not take revenge or bear a grudge. Rather, one must erase the matter from his heart, and seek to do good in every way with that person, just as he would with any other Jew, as if nothing negative had ever come between them. This is what the Torah requires of us, as it is written, "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18).

### **EVERYTHING COMES FROM HASHEM SO WE MUST ACCEPT OUR DISCOMFORT AS A RESULT OF OUR SINS**

In explaining the prohibition against taking revenge, sefer HaChinuch writes: "Among the roots of this mitzvah is that a person know and take to heart that whatever happens to him whether for good or for bad, is brought about by Hashem, Blessed is He, for nothing can occur that is contrary to His will. Therefore, when one is pained or annoyed by another, he should realize that his sins have caused this and that this has been decreed by Hashem. Thus he should not turn his thoughts to revenge, for this person is not the real cause of his hurt; rather, sin is the cause."

This explanation does not discount the fact that the one who caused hurt did so of his own free will and will be held accountable for his misdeed.

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, TEVUNAH**

**THE SEVERITY OF SPEAKING LASHON HA RA  
ABOUT WHOLE COMMUNITIES OR PARTS  
OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE**

We have previously discussed the severity of speaking LASHON HA RA against an individual. To speak disparagingly of the Jewish people as a community is a sin of far greater severity. Regarding the verses, "Do not inform on a servant to his master ... A generation which curses its father and does not bless its mother" (Mishlei 30:10-11), the Talmud expounds: "Even if a generation curses its father and does not bless its mother, do not speak against it before its Master, the Holy One, Blessed is He" (Pesachim 87b).

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, TEVUNAH

**WHOEVER FINDS MERITS IN THE JEWS  
BECOMES BELOVED OF HASHEM AND IS A  
RECEPTACLE OF HIS LIGHT**

The Torah states: "... and they [the judges] shall judge the people with righteous judgment" (Devarim 16:18).

Midrash Tanchuma comments: R' Yehudah ben R' Shalom said: [This teaches] that the judges should strive to find merit for their people before the Holy One, Blessed is He. From whom do we learn this? From Gidon ben Yoash. In his days, Israel was in distress and G-d sought someone who could speak their merit [and thereby arouse Divine compassion for them] but no one could be found, for the generation was poor in its fulfillment of mitzvot and performance of good deeds. As soon as Gidon was deemed worthy of having found merit for them, a Heavenly angel revealed himself to him. Thus it is written,

"And an angel of HASHEM appeared to him ... and he said, 'Go with this strength of yours'" (Shoftim 6:12-14), meaning, "with the strength of the merit which you found for My children."

### **HASHEM ASKS US TO JUDGE HIS SONS FAVORABLY**

This, then, is the meaning of "... and they [the judges] shall judge the people with righteous judgment," i.e. that they should strive to find merit for the generation.

The above, too, underscores the greatness of finding merit for the Jewish people before Hashem. One who does so becomes a receptacle for the spiritual light of the sacred Heavenly sanctuary which is called the Sanctuary of Merit, for it is there that the merits of Israel are mentioned, as stated in Sefer Chareidim.

**SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, TEVUNAH**

### **THE TRAIT OF PATIENCE AND TOLERANCE [SAVLANUT] IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TO AVOID THE SINS OF SPEECH**

Through such character development, the quality of SHEMIRAT HA LASHON is easily attainable. Conversely, one who lacks SAVLANUT will forever be torn by the need to relate the wrongs which others have done against him. At times, he will prevail in this struggle; other times, he will fail.

A SAVLAN is capable of bearing insult in silence. He tells himself that whatever occurs is an expression of Divine will,

and that in reality his own sins are the true causes of his being shamed.' When one accepts disgrace in this way, totally and sincerely, Hashem surely elevates his stature in this world and in the next.

**ONE SHOULD LEARN TO FEEL A SENSE OF  
GRATITUDE WHEN HASHEM BRINGS  
SUFFERING UPON US**

The Sages teach:

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov said: One should feel a sense of gratitude toward the Holy One, Blessed is He, when suffering comes upon him. Why? Because suffering draws a person close to Him, as it is written, "Hashem reproves the one whom He loves" (Mishlei 3:12).

When suffering comes upon a person, he should accept it and withstand [the test], for its reward is infinite (Midrash Tanchumah, Parashas Ki Tetzei 2). "Wait silently for [the salvation of Hashem, and wait longingly for Him" (Tehillim 37:7). Place your hope in the Holy One, Blessed is He. If He brings afflictions upon you, do not demonstrate disdain; rather, accept your lot ...

(Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 729).

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON TEVUNAH 8

**AN ADVICE ON BEARING INSULT FROM THE  
HOLY RABBI ELIEZER AZCARI ZTK'L**

The author of Sefer Chareidim writes:

Whenever someone insults or humiliates me in public, I place a scale before my eyes: On one side are my sins, on the other side

are the insults and humiliations which have been directed toward me. I see the side of my sins weighing down lower and lower, and I choose to bear my disgrace in silence and tell myself that I deserve it. I do this whenever faced with any sort of distress, be it through another's word or deed (Sefer Charedim 4:5).

### **THE ONE WHO BEARS INSULTS HAS ALL HIS SINS FORGIVEN**

Rava said: Whoever refrains from exacting his measure [i.e. from responding to the hurt caused him], [the Heavenly Tribunal] removes from him all his sins, as it is written, "He forgives transgressions and passes over sins" (Michah 7:18). Whose sin does He forgive? One who passes over sins [commuted against himself] (Rosh Hashanah 17a).

### **HAVING FAITH AND TRUST IN HASHEM HELPS THE PERSON BEAR ANY INSULT OR LOSS CAUSED BY OTHERS AND WILL DETER ONE FROM SPEAKING EVIL OF OTHERS**

One who seeks to acquire the quality of shmirat halashon must strengthen his bitachon, trust in Hashem, so that he will not become upset if someone will cause him any sort of hurt or loss. With proper bitachon, one will refrain from speaking negatively in such instances and will refrain, as well, from feuding with or shaming the guilty party. Rather, he will be confident that Hashem will replenish his losses in the way that He sees fit.

The Talmud states: "Whoever places his trust in the Holy One, Blessed is He, will merit that He will be a refuge for him in this world and the next" (Menachot 29b).

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON TEVUNAH 8

### **THE ROOT CAUSES OF LASHON HA RA**

The root causes of LASHON HA RA are anger, scoffing, arrogance, despair, thinking Hashem is not listening; negativity and saying it is permissible. We shall elaborate upon each of these traits.

#### **ANGER: IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTROL ONE'S MOUTH**

There are those whose frequent transgression of the laws of forbidden speech is rooted in the trait of anger. These people are by nature quick-tempered, and their anger flares at the slightest provocation. In a fit of anger, they find it impossible to control their tongues, speaking whatever comes to mind. There is no hope for such people to develop the quality of shmirat halashon unless they learn to overcome their tendency toward anger.

#### **ARROGANCE: HE IS THE BEST AND ALL THE OTHERS ARE BELOW HIM THEREFORE HE FEELS HE CAN SLANDER THEM**

Among the root causes of LASHON HA RA is, arrogance. The arrogant person views himself as a man of wisdom and stature, and he looks down upon everyone else. It is therefore only

natural that he will ridicule others. The arrogant person is also filled with jealousy and enmity toward anyone in his community who is accorded greater honor than he. He tells himself, "Were it not for him, would be the recipient of all that honor!" This attitude brings him to delve into the other person's history until he finds something derogatory to say about him, be it true or false, so that he can heap scorn and shame upon that individual and lower his stature among people.

**SCOFFING: ALWAYS MAKING FUN AND  
LAUGHING ABOUT OTHERS AND LOOKING  
FOR PEOPLE WHO WILL LISTEN  
TO HIS SCOFFING**

Another root cause of LASHON HA RA is scoffing. Some people are accustomed to scoff at anything and attach to people who are of the same kind. The Talmud states (Sotah 42b) that four groups will not merit to greet the Divine Presence: flatterers; liars; [habitual] speakers of LASHON HA RA; and scoffers.' In addition to his own sins the scoffer causes others to sin those who join him in his ridicule. If they only could retain themselves from speaking they would merit eternal reward.

**DESPAIR: THE PERSON THINKS: "HOW CAN  
ANYONE COMPLY WITH ALL THESE LAWS?"**

Another root cause of LASHON HA RA is despair. Some people don't believe they are able to live by the rules of proper speech. They convince themselves to think that anyone who interacts in the world with others is incapable of following the



laws of LASHON HA RA. But nevertheless it is known that Hashem does not make excessive demands of his people, if we are commanded to keep these laws is because it is within our capabilities to do so.

**HEFKER: HASHEM IS NOT AWARE OF HIS WORDS AND OTHERS DON'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT THE LAWS OF LASHON HA RA**

Another root cause of LASHON HA RA is the fact that some people think that either Hashem is not listening to what we are saying or some others think that LASHON HA RA is not a sin at all, G-d forbid. Such blatant disregard for this prohibition causes that others who might observe the laws of LASHON HA RA and be cautious with their words weaken their resolve

**NEGATIVITY: PEOPLE WHO VIEW EVERYONE AS BEING AGAINST THEM AND THEN LASH OUT AT THEM WITH THE FULL FORCE OF THEIR TONGUE**

Another root cause of LASHON HA RA is negativity. These are people who are constantly complaining and finding fault in everybody else's conduct and they take every opportunity available to criticize others.

**ONE CAN LOOSE ALL THE REWARDS OF THE MITZVOT ONE HAS PERFORMED BECAUSE OF THE SIN OF LASHON HA RA**

Those who seek to get rid of these evil traits should contemplate their destructive effects and with the help of

Hashem they will find strength to avoid LASHON HA RA. For a person can spend a lifetime accruing merit through the performance of mitzvot and the study of Torah. Yet he can come to the Next World and find that his merits have been nullified by his negative attitude towards others. The bounty of spiritual reward that had been awaiting him was washed away by the waves of scorn, slander and strife which poured forth from his lips.

SEFER SHEMIRAT HA LASHON, TEVUNAH 13

*"One who seeks to purify himself is granted Heavenly assistance" (Shabbat 104a).*

*In Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu (I, ch. 15) we read: "Those who strike their fellow stealthily [through LASHON HA RA] those who desecrate the Name in public, those who belittle their neighbors with words, and those who incite strife, their end will be that of Korach; regarding them does the Torah state: 'The earth covered them over [and they were lost from among the congregation]' " (Bamidbar 16:33).*

*Those who are insulted and do not insult, who hear their disgrace and do not respond, who act out of love and are happy in their affliction, regarding them does scripture state (Shoftim 5:31): "But they who love Him shall be like the sun going forth in its might" (Shabbat 88b).*

## CHAPTER 11

### ***THE DUTY TO REBUKE AND ADMONISH OTHERS***

QUOTATIONS FROM TALMUD, ZOHAR AND MIDRASH

*“Do not say that the pit and grave will be your refuge (Avos 4:21) In this world you have the burden of livelihood and many other worries. You are therefore not aware of minor annoyances. A mosquito can bite you, and because of your many concerns, you may not even feel it. But in the grave you have no other distractions. You can even hear the sound of the maggots crawling toward you and feel the pain of their every bite into your flesh. There is nothing that can take your mind away from this suffering. G-d help us”.*

(Rebbe Nachman, Sichot ha Ran 84)

*One should love admonition, for as long as there is admonition in the world, goodness and blessing come to the world, and evil departs from the world.*

(Tamid 28a)

- 1) Anyone capable of admonishing reproaching or rebuking members of his household and does not do so: is punished and considered culpable for the sins of the members of his household; against the people of his city, is punished for the sins of the people of his city, against the entire world, is punished for the sins of the of the entire world (Shabbat 54b)
- 2) Since Pinchas should have protested against Hophni, Scripture considers it as though he had sinned (Shabbat 55b)
- 3) One who has the ability to admonish and protest and does not, the sin is ascribed to him (Yerushalmi Shabbat ch. 5).
- 4) Because of four things, the property of householders is usurped by the government, (one of which is) because they have the ability to protest and do not do so (Sukkah 29b)
- 5) There were great men of Israel who saw evil and looked the other way. The Holy One remarked to them, "There will come a time when I will do likewise." (Midrash Rabbah, Lamentations).
- 6) Abner was punished (by being killed) because he should have protested against Saul, and did not do so. (Sanhedrin 20a)

7) Joshua the high priest wore soiled garments because his sons married women unfit for the priesthood, and he did not protest against them (Sanhedrin 93a)

8) Concerning Zedekiah it is written (11 Kings 24:19): And he did what was evil in the eyes of the L-rd. The evil is attributed to him because he was able to protest and didn't (Sanh. 103a)

### **BLESSINGS AND CURSES DEPEND ON ADMONISHING OTHERS**

9) If a person learned, taught, observed, (negative commandments), and performed (positive commandments), but did not protest, he is deemed cursed. On the other hand, if a person did not learn, did not perform (positive commandments), did not observe (negative commandments), did not teach others, and did not have the ability to protest, yet he protested, he is deemed blessed. (Vayikra Rabbah 25)

10) The Holy One, Blessed be He, said (to the Divine Attribute of Justice): "These are completely righteous men, and these are completely wicked ones." He replied: "It is fully revealed to me that they had the ability to protest, but did not do so." He responded: "It is fully known to Me that if they had protested, they would not have heeded them." He retorted: "If it is fully known to You, is it fully known to them?" They, therefore, should have protested and allowed themselves to be humiliated for the sanctity of Your Name, and to suffer beatings from the Jews. (Tanhuma Tazria 9)

11) "Take all the leaders of the people and hang them. (Num. 25:4)" The sins were attributed to the leaders of the people because they did not protest. (Tanhuma Balak 19)

### **THE ONE WHO CAN PROTEST BUT DOESN'T HAS BLOOD ON HIS HANDS**

12) Who was responsible for the deaths of all those killed in the civil war against Benjamin because of the killing of the concubine in Gibeah of Benjamin? Pinchas! Because he had the power to protest and did not protest. We learn from this that anyone who has the power to protest and does neither protest nor attempt to bring the Jews to improve their ways, all blood that is shed among the Jews, is shed because of him. (Yalkut Judges 68)

13) The great Sanhedrin should have tied iron ropes around their waists and lifted their clothes above their knees and gone throughout all the cities of Israel, one day to Lachish, one day to Eglon, one day to Hebron, one day to Jerusalem, to teach them proper manners. (ibid)

14) Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not admonish one another. (Shabbat 119)

### **IT IS NOT A GOOD SIGN WHEN A SCHOLAR OR RABBI IS LOVED BY ALL PEOPLE**

15) If a Rabbinical scholar is loved by the people of his city, it is not because he is superior, but because he does not admonish them concerning matters of Heaven. (Kethuboth 105b)

16) When the footsteps of the Mashiach will be heard, there will be no admonition. (Sotah 49a)

17) Because of what did Jeroboam merit the kingdom? Because he castigated Solomon. (Sanhedrin 101b)

18) Everyone who admonishes his friend for the sake of Heaven, merits the portion of the Holy One, Blessed be He; moreover, a mantle of grace is drawn over him. (Tamid 28)

19) Anyone who knows how to admonish and admonishes the public, brings contentment to his Creator. (Tana d've Eliyahu Rabba 3)

**ONE WHO FLATTERS THE WICKED  
DESERVES ALL THE CURSES  
OF THE TORAH**

20) One who knows that his fellow man is wicked, yet he flatters him, or if he knows that his colleague is full of sins, yet he says to him, "You are righteous," deserves that all the curses in the Torah come upon him. However, one who admonishes his colleague that he repent, takes the blessings of the one who is admonished. If he accepts the admonition and repents then, he too, receives blessings. (Yalkut Devarim 793)

21) Is there any man who hates his son? However, if he does not admonish him concerning Torah, wisdom, and proper manners, he will eventually hate him. If he admonishes him, however, he will eventually love him. (Yalkut Proverbs 950)

**THE RIGHTEOUS ARE CONSIDERED  
EVILDOERS IF THEY DON'T PROTEST**

22) The Divine Attribute of Justice rose and said before G-d: Even on the righteous among them, You shall write on their foreheads a Tav of blood, Tav standing for Tamut [You shall die]. The Holy One, Blessed be He, replied and said: "Why?" She answered, "Because they did not reproach your children with words of admonition, and they did not instruct them not to sin." The Holy One, replied, "It is revealed before me that if

they had admonished them, they would not have listened". The Attribute of Justice replied, "Even though they would not have accepted, nevertheless, the righteous should have rebuked them". The Holy One acceded and proceeded to treat the righteous of that generation in Jerusalem as wrongdoers. Six angels of destruction were dispensed to Jerusalem and they devastated it (Otyot R' Akiva).

23) The righteous man is conscientious to go to the wrongdoers to help them turn away from their sins. He informs them of the heavenly judgment and the punishment of Gehinomm. He does not allow himself to rest day or night until he has rebuked them and brought them to full repentance. (Zohar Pg. 20b)

### **ALL JEWS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ONE ANOTHER**

24) All Jews are responsible for each other. (Shevuos 39a)

25) Why do many Torah scholars die young? The answer is: they allow themselves to be disgraced, for they do not avenge like a snake the words of Torah and the fear of Heaven. (Avos of R Nasson)

26) Some sins are so great that those who commit them are not afforded Divine assistance to repent. Included among them is one who was able to rebuke others, be it a group or individuals, and did not do so but left them in their backsliding. (Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 4:1)

27) It is a Jew's duty to protest against sinners. Anyone who, has the ability to protest, and does not do so, is held responsible for that sin. (Remah Yore Deah 334:48)