

LASHON HARA PART 3

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Last week we discussed how we cannot say derogatory things about other people. There is another category of speech which constitutes lashon hara even though it may not be derogatory: The Torah generally forbids us from saying things that could cause damage to a person. For example, if a person is looking to find employment, it is not allowed to jeopardize his chances by telling his prospective employers information that may cause them to choose not to employ him.

This aspect of the laws of lashon hara requires us to develop a heightened sense of awareness of how we speak about other people. If we are not careful then some undue damage may result from divulging information about others.

The Torah requires that, as well as not speaking lashon hara ourselves, we should be careful to not cause our friends to speak badly about other people. A common occurrence in this area is that we may innocently mention somebody's name to the other person and he will then launch into a critique of that person. We should be extra careful when we are aware of tension between two people that we never mention the name of one of the antagonists in front of the other one for doing so would inevitably lead to lashon hara.

Moreover, unfortunately there are some people who very often criticize others - when speaking to such people it is advisable that we strive to never mention other people's names.

There are a number of laws that relate to the event that someone does speak negatively about others in front of us. One is that we should not encourage them to continue speaking in this negative vein. The most unthreatening way of doing so is by subtly changing the subject. If this does not succeed then it is advisable to try to end the conversation as soon as possible.

Like all mitzvos between man and man, lashon hara teaches us a great deal about how we should act in our daily lives. One lesson we can learn from the above laws is that it is generally a good thing to not spend much of our time discussing other people. There are more important things to discuss than details about the lives of other people and if we recognize this then we can begin to speak more constructively.

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