

LASHON HARA PART 5

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

We have thus far discussed the prohibitions of speaking and listening to lashon hara. There is another form of forbidden speech which is known as 'Rechillut', or talebearing. This involves reporting what people say about each other thereby causing ill feeling amongst one of the parents. For example, John tells Dave how much he dislikes Brian and speaks at length about Brian's negative traits. Dave decides to share John's words with Brian himself. Understandably Brian is very upset and this causes a great rift in the relationship between John and Brian. It is also likely to damage John's relationship with Dave because John cannot trust that Dave will spread his words in the future. Of course John was completely at fault for blatantly speaking negatively about Brian. Nonetheless, this does not justify Dave's passing on this discussion to Brian - this only causes ill will between all concerned .

The Talmud says that 'rechillut' is in some ways even more damaging than normal lashon hara: In the case of lashon hara the victim may never actually become aware of what was said about him and therefore will not feel the pain of being spoken about in a negative fashion. Whereas in the case of rechillus it is inevitable that the negative opinions will become known and relationships will be damaged.

It is also important to note that the victim of the rechillus should not blindly accept the words of the gossiper. So, in our case, Brian should not jump to conclusions and assume that everything Dave claims that John said about him is true. As we discussed last week, it is very likely that Dave's words do not represent the complete truth.

The Torah views the ability to speak as a tremendous gift - one that no other creature possesses. A person can do tremendous good if he uses his speech in the right way. However, we also have the ability to use it for evil - to cause pain to others by speaking negatively about them. These laws teach us that if we do not want to cause undue pain then we must be extra vigilant about our speech. So the next time we have the opportunity to speak about what people say about each other let us think about the possible consequences of such words. If there is any chance that such speech could cause pain then it is highly advisable to refrain from it and remain quiet or try to say pleasant words that give joy to people's lives.

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