

LASHON HARA PART 6

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In the past weeks we have discussed the various prohibitions that relate to harmful speech. However, there are situations in which it is permissible and perhaps even required to speak negatively about others. The Torah tells us, "Do not stand by your brother's blood.¹" This means that when our friend is in danger we are obligated to try to help him in any way possible. This commandment is not limited to physical danger - it is also incumbent upon us to prevent our friend suffering financial, psychological, or emotional damage.

Consequently, there are occasions where the only way in which we can protect a person is by informing him of the negative actions or intentions of someone else - this would inevitably involve lashon hara. However, in such situations it is permitted to do so in order to protect our friend, as long as a number of conditions are met².

An example of this is if we know that our friend is about to embark on a business venture with a person known to be untrustworthy. In this situation we are obligated to try to save our friend from potential financial loss. In such a scenario it would be permitted to speak negatively about one person in order to save the other if the conditions are all adhered to.

There are other types of situations where it may be permissible to relate negative information: One is where we need to discuss a person's faults in order to help him improve. For example, it may be necessary to discuss a student in school who is causing disruption and where it is likely that negative aspects of his character will be brought up. Given the right conditions, this is considered a valid reason for speaking critically.

Another possible example is where a person feels the need to vent his feelings by talking about an incident in which someone else caused them some kind of pain. If the goal of where speaking in such a way is to release our feelings and NOT simply to criticize the other person, then one may be allowed to do so. This does not of course mean that we can discuss these feelings on a day-to-day basis to your spouse or friend! Rather it refers to rare occasions in which we really feel hurt by someone and where we feel the need to share our pain with someone close to us.

It is essential to remember that all of the above situations are subject to a number of conditions that MUST be adhered to before one is allowed to speak lashon hara. In the forthcoming weeks, these conditions will be discussed, and it will be apparent that, in practice, one must be very careful about saying anything negative about others even when it seems that it should be permitted.

¹ Kedoshim, 19:16.

² These will be enumerated in future essays.

Text Copyright © 2008 by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen and **Torah.org**