

# TATTLETALING

by Joshua Kruger

## Once upon a time

Yehudit and Leah were walking home after a hard day at school. For weeks, their class had been trying to behave perfectly, because they were promised a Rosh Chodesh party by their teacher if everyone's behavior was good. But, on this day, some of the bags of treats set aside for the party, went missing from the teacher's drawer. No one knew who had taken it and their teacher was quite upset.

"It's really not fair," said Yehudit, "we've worked so hard this whole month and someone had to ruin it! I'm pretty sure that Mrs. Levy thinks it was Rachel. She seemed to be staring at Rachel while she lectured us about how wrong it is to steal."

"Actually" said Leah "I'm fairly certain it wasn't Rachel. I saw the bags of treats in one of the other girl's school bag and she quickly closed her bag looking very guilty when she saw that the zipper had opened."

"Omigoodness!" exclaimed Yehudit, "You have to tell the teacher!"

## Discussion

**Q:** What is the connection between our story and the *parsha*?

**A:** *Parashas Tazria* deals with *tzara'as*, a sickness of the skin that was a punishment for *lashon hara*.

**Q:** Is *tattletaling* allowed?

**A:** If we are certain that the person did something wrong, and that telling on them will have a positive effect, then *lashon hara* can be permitted. In our story, for example, telling the teacher may prevent Rachel from being wrongly accused and embarrassed, and will enable the teacher to deal effectively with the situation. However, there are a number of important conditions that must be met (*Chafetz Chaim, Klal 10*). The following questions deal with some of conditions.

**Q:** If Leah decides that she will not tell the teacher that she saw the treats in the school bag of their classmate, can Yehudit (assuming Yehudit knows which girl it was)?

**A:** No. One of the conditions taught by the *Chafetz Chaim* is that we must be certain that the person actually committed the act. Yehudit did not actually see the treats in the girls school bag. She only heard about it from Leah. She therefore cannot be certain, and cannot tell the teacher about the

incident.

**Q:** If Rachel decides that she should tell the teacher about the girl who had the treats in her bag, then there is something that she should do first. What is it?

**A:** Where possible, she should try to first discuss the matter with the girl. This will give the girl a chance to confess her crime to the teacher and change her ways with minimal embarrassment. Furthermore, perhaps there was a good reason why the girl had the treats in her bag and she wasn't actually stealing!

### **Back to Our Story**

Leah asked her father for advice, and they looked up the halacha together. They saw that although it is probably okay for *lashon harah* to help clear Rachel's name it was best for Leah to go up to the girl who took the food and to privately convince her to tell the truth to the teacher. This worked well and a week later, the class happily celebrated Rosh Chodesh with treats and with smiles.

(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, and based on the following article:

<http://www.dinonline.org/2013/04/13/informing-on-others-mitzvah-or-prohibition/>)