**The Key to Life: Guard Your Tongue**

*"Hashem formed man out of dust of the ground, and He blew into his nostrils a soul of life, and man became a living* ***speaking*** *being." (Gen. 2:7)*

*“You shall not go around as a talebearer amidst your people.” (Vayikra 19:16)*

**Lashon Hara includes any speech that is either:**

1. Derogatory (even if it is not harmful), or
2. Harmful (even if it not derogatory).
3. *Rechilus:* Any information that might cause the listener to feel wronged by the subject.

Derogatory includes information about how the person did/does not follow the Torah, or did/does not have good character, or anything that would be embarrassing for the person. The definition of derogatory is certainly subjective. But if, in any way, this information comes across as derogatory on either the part of the speaker or the listener, it is not ok.

**Common excuses that do NOT allow Lashon Hara to be spoken:**

1. “But it is true.”
2. “I am just saying my opinion.”
3. “I don’t mean it as something bad. It is the listener that took it that way.” (Note: Even praise can become Lashon Hara if in context that information can be misconstrued or used against the subject or upsets the listener because he becomes jealous).
4. “I also do it” or “Everybody does it.”
5. “I have his permission.” (Permission *would* allow harmful information to be shared but would *not* allow derogatory information.)
6. “Everybody knows it.” (Public knowledge *would* allow harmful information to be shared but would *not* allow derogatory information. “Public” means that it was said in the presence of at least 3 people).
7. “I am just sharing it with my spouse.”
8. “It isn’t really about the person themselves. It is about a product.”
9. “I didn’t mention the name. The listener figured it out on their own.”
10. “It wasn’t about an individual. It was about a whole group.”
11. “I didn’t say anything. I was just quiet and the person figured it out on their own.”

**Lashon Hara is allowed to be spoken:**

1. About a person who violates Torah commandments intentionally. “Intentionally” means they know it is wrong and they are doing it from a place of spite, not a place of weakness).
2. If it constructive and the 7 conditions listed below are met.

**Constructive speech includes:**

1. To help the subject out.
2. To help or protect someone who is being (or will be) negatively affected by the subject.
3. To help someone restore damage that was done to them.
4. To help end a dispute.
5. To help people learn from someone’s mistakes.

**The 7 conditions that allow constructive negative speech are:**

1. It was witnessed firsthand by the speaker. (Note: If it was not firsthand, but the speaker must say it in order to prevent harm, he must state clearly that it is secondhand information.)
2. The speaker investigated what they witnessed to make sure they go it right.
3. If possible, the person spoke to the perpetrator first and tried to solve things that way.
4. The person says only what is necessary to the listener.
5. No exaggeration.
6. The speakers sole intent is for this to be constructive.
7. No undue harm will be caused to the subject.

**How to do Teshuva for Lashon Hara and Rechilus:**

1. The standard 4 steps that you do for any transgression (regret, abandoning the sin, making a plan for the future, and confessing to Hashem), and
2. Asking the subject forgiveness. If asking the subject forgiveness will cause him even more anguish, it is better to forgo this step.
3. Let the listeners know that you have given over inaccurate information

**The Key to Life: Guard Your Tongue (Part 2)**

*“Gossip kills three people: the speaker, the listener and the person being discussed” (Babylonian Talmud, Arachin 15b)*

*“You shall not accept a false report.” (Shmos 23: 1)*

**It is a Torah prohibition to:**

1. Listen to Lashon Hara when it is being spoken.
2. Believe any information that is being communicated.
3. Be the cause or accomplice of someone speaking Lashon Hara. “*You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person”. (Vayikra 19:14)*

In addition to the prohibition of accepting Lashon Hara, one who finds himself in a situation where Lashon Hara is being communicated to him has two additional specific Torah obligations (in addition to the many more general Torah obligations that require him to love his fellow, and fear, cleave to, sanctify Hashem, etc.).

**The additional obligations are:**

1. To judge the subject favorably: *“In righteousness shall you judge your neighbor” (Vayikra 19:15).*
2. To rebuke the speaker: *“You shall rebuke your neighbor”* (Vayikra 19:17).

**What to do when being the recipient of Lashon Hara:**

1. Best option: Interrupt (and possible rebuke at the right time and in the right way depending on who the person is e.g. parent/rabbi).
2. If one is uncomfortable interrupting, try to change the subject.
3. If that doesn’t work, then walk away .
4. Last resort: Ignore.

**Listening to Lashon Hara is allowed when:**

Note: Both of these categories allow one to **listen** and take precautions, but they do NOT allow one to **believe** as fact what is being told to them. The speaker themselves should convey that.

1. It is for a Constructive purpose (see criteria in Part 1) BUT one must ensure that the speaker too is speaking for constructive reasons.
2. If the person is unloading to blow off steam.

**Matchmaking, Business Partnerships and New Relationships**

The following is proper protocol when someone is asked about a person in regards to a shidduch or business partnership:

1. It is prohibited to suggest a relationship to someone if you know that the suggested party is unfit for marriage for any reason.
2. It is prohibited to suggest a relationship to someone if you know that the suggested party is not really what the person is looking for. This is true even if you think that you know better than them what they need.
3. One can suggest a relationship and conceal information if they feel that the suggested party might be judged unfairly if that information is revealed too early. In such a case they should reveal that information once the parties have gotten to know each other somewhat, but not wait long enough that there are already strong feelings.
4. One should not encourage a relationship without knowing both parties, simply because he believes that the parties “need to get married already”.
5. If someone is being contacted as a reference for one of the parties, they are not allowed to hold back information about an absolute shortcoming. However, if there is information that is being asked that is purely subjective (“Did the person get good grades?” or even certain age gaps), they are allowed to say “I don’t know”. If the questions that are being asked have no definitive barometer (“Is he smart?”), the reference has a right to remain silent.
6. If one is aware of a relationship that is brewing and knows that there is important information to share, they are not allowed to remain silent, even if they are not asked.

**The Key to Life: Guard Your Tongue (Part 3)**

**Quick Tools to Minimize Lashon Hara**

1. Reading about the dangers of Lashon hara and learning the laws.
2. Taking on specific times each day to have greater awareness
3. Surrounding oneself with people who speak good about people. Distancing from people who speak Lashon Hara.

**8 Traits To Eradicate Lashon Hara completely**

**Silence** *“All my life I have been raised amongst the wise and I have found nothing better for the body than silence.” (Avos 1:17)*

Modern day culture has turned talking into a virtue. We create social situations where we are forced to make conversation even though we have nothing to say. The Torah puts higher value on creating spaces in one’s life where one does not have to talk.

**Loving peace** *“Be like the students of Aharon, Love peace and chase peace” (Avos 1:12)*

Our Sages teach that Aharon spent most of his day running around counseling couples and making peace between friends. But the greatest example of pursuing peace is from Moshe. In the famous story about the rebellion of Korach, Moshe humbled himself so much as to chase after the people who were causing all of the problems for him, and trying to appease them.

**Loving one’s fellow** *Love the creatures and bring them close to Torah. (ibd.)*

Our Sages teach (based on a verse in Prophets): Hashem says “My beloved children, Is there anything that I lack that should have to ask of you? All that I ask is that you love one another and honor one another. In this way, no sin will be found among you.” This is the meaning of the verse (Devarim 14:1), “You are children to Hashem, Your God”. Protect the honor and reputation of others like one would of his or her own family.

**Forgiveness** *Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone. (Vayikra 19:18)*

Many people are afraid to forgive because they feel that it is somehow giving a free pass to the person that wronged them. Forgiveness is simply the mindset that you will no longer allow yourself to dwell in the pain that was cause by this person and you are no longer waiting for restitution from this person.

**Judging others favorably** *Judge every man to the side of merit.(Avos 1:6)*

* Application #1: If there is even a slight question as to whether or not there was a wrong committed, one is obligated to assume that the wrong was NOT committed. (The exception to this rule is when the subject has an established reputation of committing a certain wrong.)
* Application #2: If you are absolutely certain that wrong was done, refrain from passing negative judgement and try to focus on the good in the person and create rationalizations why the subject acted the way they did.
* Application #3: If the subject is known to be a righteous person and you are certain that they did something wrong, assume that they immediately regretted it and did proper *Teshuva.*

**Trust in Hashem** *"All that the Merciful One does, He does for good."(Brochos 60b)*

One who believes that everything is from Hashem develops the mindset that even when someone does wrong to him, that too was directed towards him from Hashem and, for reasons beyond our comprehension, this too is for the good. This was what Yosef told his brothers when they reunited.

**Humility** *One who advances his name, destroys his name. (Avos 1:13)*

Many words of Lashon Hara are spoken by people who feel that they were not given enough honor or that people don’t look up to them the way they would like. A humble attitude will minimize the frustration that people experience.

**Positivity** *Who is rich? One who rejoices with his lot. (Avos 4:1)*

People who believe that everyone is out to get them, included God, are consistent speakers of Lashon Hara. They seek to complain and find fault at every opportunity that they can, and to criticize others to their face and behind their back. In order to avoid Lashon Hara, a person must reframe how he views the world and begin to see things in a more positive light.

**How to Properly Work on Character Traits**

1. Create a calendar with 1-2 weeks devoted to 1 trait at a time. Then repeat.
2. Devote a 15-20 minutes each day reading material about that particular trait.
3. Have a mantra for the week that will serve as a constant reminder that you are working on the trait. Post it. Hang it. Sing it. Meditate on it.
4. Keep a journal where you can jot down your successes and failures.
5. Reward yourself based on your successes.