

31 Commands of Lashon Hara

(Author unknown)

"Do not go about as a talebearer among your people."

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:16

The repercussions of the mitzvah of proper speech, and the transgression of Lashon Hara (Evil Tongue), are so intense that they have literally shaped the destiny of our people. The Jewish People have been in exile for 2,000 years, because of words that come out of our mouths.

The power we wield when we speak is far beyond what we can perceive. A key factor in our relationship to the Most High and in living our lives as Jews. Lashon Hara is so powerful that it can erase the merits of a lifetime of Torah learning and mitzvah observance.

Just as the negative consequences of speech can be so vast, the positive consequences of proper speech are even greater. The Vilna Gaon says that proper speech is the single biggest factor in determining one's portion in the World to Come. The Chofetz Chaim tells us that adherence to the Laws of proper speech empowers our davening, validates our Torah learning, accesses Divine Protection and invokes the many blessings the Most High, that in His kindness, He is waiting to shower upon us.

When a person speaks or listens to Lashon Hara, **31** mitzvot may be violated. Even though one does not generally violate them all at once, it is important to remember how carelessness can lead one into deeper trouble. This applies equally to Rechilut and Lashon Hara.

- **Lashon Hara** - any derogatory or damaging (physically, financially, socially, or stress-inducing) communication.
- **Rechilut** - any communication that generates animosity between people.

Rechilut is often the repeating of Lashon Hara. For example, Reuven tells Shimon that Levi is ugly (Reuven spoke Lashon Hara), and then Shimon tells Levi what Reuven said about him. Shimon probably made Levi angry with Reuven, which is Rechilut.

The Torah delineates different situations and conditions, and identifies when the speech is forbidden, permissible, and even desirable. One type of Lashon Hara, speaking lies (slander) is called "Motzi Shem Ra" (spreading a bad name). It's pretty easy to imagine how lies, and even exaggeration, can unfairly damage someone's reputation.

A case discussed in the Talmud involves someone who has purchased an item at a "no exchanges, no returns" market. The Talmud instructs us to say that it's a nice buy, regardless of what it is in reality. This case shows that truth is not always the deciding factor in ethical Jewish speech. In fact, the definition of Lashon Hara does not reflect truth or falsehood at all, but the damage that it can inflict.

But sometimes we speak Lashon Hara because we forget that in many cases, truth can be subjective (like "beauty is in the eye of the beholder") or elusive, in that we don't always know the whole picture.

"In righteousness shall you judge your kinsman."

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:15

This verse commands us to give the benefit of the doubt. We are expected to always judge other Jews favorably, to believe that there may have been factors of which we are not aware. Don't judge other people, unless you find yourself in their situation. As you judge others, you will also be judged. In other words: "Think twice before you speak (or judge)."

Negative Commandments Relating to Lashon Hara

1. "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people" (Vayikra 19:16)
2. "You shall not utter a false report" (Shmot 23:1)
3. "Take heed concerning the plague of leprosy" (Dvarim 24:8)
4. "Before the blind do not put a stumbling block" (Vayikra 19:14)
5. "Beware lest you forget the Lord, your G-d" (Dvarim 8:11)
6. "You shall not profane My holy name" (Vayikra 22:32)
7. "You shall not hate your brother in your heart" (Vayikra 19:12)
8. "You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of your people" (Vayikra 19:18)
9. "You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of your people" (Vayikra 19:18)
10. "One witness shall not rise up against a man for iniquity or for any sin" (Dvarim 19:15)
11. "You shall not follow a multitude to do evil" (Shmot 23:2)
12. "You shall not act similar to Korach and his company" (Bamidbar 17:5)
13. "You shall not wrong one another" (Vayikra 25:17)
14. "(You shall rebuke your neighbor) and you shall not bear sin because of him" (Vayikra 19:17)
15. "Any widow or orphan shall you not afflict" (Shmot 22:21)
16. "You shall not pollute the land wherein you are" (Bamidbar 35:33)
17. "You shall not curse the deaf" (Vayikra 19:14)

Positive Commandments Relating to Lashon Hara

1. "Remember what the Lord your G-d did until Miriam by the way as you came forth out of Egypt" (Dvarim 24:9)
2. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18)
3. "In righteousness shall you judge your neighbor" (Vayikra 19:15)
4. "If your brother be waxen poor and his means fail him when he is with you, then you shall uphold him" (Vayikra 25:35)
5. "You shall rebuke your neighbor" (Vayikra 19:17)
6. "To Him shall you cleave" (Dvarim 10:20)
7. "You shall fear My sacred place" (Vayikra 19:30)
8. "Before the gray-haired you shall rise up, and you shall honor the face of the old man" (Vayikra 19:32)
9. "You shall sanctify Him" (Vayikra 21:8)
10. "Honor your father and mother" (Shmot 20:12)
11. "The Lord your G-d shall you fear" (Dvarim 10:20)
12. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them by the way when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Dvarim 6:7)
13. "From a false matter you shall keep yourself far" (Shmot 23:7)
14. "Walk in His ways" (Dvarim 28:9)

Guard Your Tongue!