

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha Tazria the Torah describes how the Kohain was responsible for diagnosing tzaraas, a skin disease which afflicted Jews who had violated Torah ethics, especially the prohibition against speaking Lashon Horah - slander. The Talmud tells us that Lashon Horah kills three people: the speaker, the listener, and the one about whom the slander is spoken. (Erachin 15a) The following inspirational story will inspire us to watch our words.

Once, there was a man in a small town who did not like the mayor of the town. The mayor had done the man no harm and, in fact, was a very good person. The man was perhaps jealous of the prestige of the mayor.

Therefore, the man began to spread terrible rumors and lies about the mayor. As a result the mayor's reputation and good name were severely damaged. When the man realized the extent of the damage he had caused, he felt very remorseful.

He chose to visit the mayor in order to beg for his forgiveness. He asked the mayor "Is there any way I can undo the damage I have done?"

The mayor replied "Go home and take a feather pillow from your bed. Tear it open and scatter the feathers to the wind."

Eager to make up for the damage he had caused the mayor, the man rushed home and did as the mayor had suggested. He returned to the mayor later in the day and reported that he had done as the mayor had requested.

"Very good," the mayor told him, "Now there is one thing more you must do. Go out and collect the feathers and return them to the pillow".

"But mayor," stammered the man, "That's impossible. "By this time they have scattered far and wide and there is no way I can find each of them!" The mayor nodded wisely and replied, "Just as the feathers are gone and scattered to the wind, so too are the words you have spoken about me - there is no way you can ever gather them all back." Such is the damage of Lashon Horah. (Attributed to the Chofetz Chayim)

It should be enough that the Torah explicitly forbids speaking Lashon Horah. However, the Sages, wishing to emphasize the severity of this violation, have expressed in many places the evil of Lashon Horah. For example, the Sages tell us, "Anyone who speaks Lashon Horah and anyone listens and accepts Lashon Horah as being true... is fit to be thrown to the dogs." (Pesachim 118a)

Also, "Anyone who speaks Lashon Horah should be killed by stoning." (Erachin 15b) And if this were not bad enough, the Sages go on to tell us: "Concerning one who speaks Lashon Horah, the Holy One blessed be He says, 'he and I cannot live [together] in this world.'" (Ibid.)

As we approach Pesach, it is important to internalize the lessons of this week's parsha. Pesach marks the beginning of the independence of the Jewish people, a process which was completed at Har Sinai with the receiving of the Torah. The concepts of Pesach therefore symbolize the character of the Jewish Nation. Apropos to our discussion about Lashon Horah, the Chassidische Seforim tell us that the word "Pesach" can be separated into two words "Peh" - mouth, and "Sach" speak. Also, Pharaoh can be broken down into "Peh" mouth, and "Rah" - bad. Thus, the Jewish Nation is recognized by their great ability to express themselves with their mouths. While the Egyptians - the nations, are symbolized by their use of the mouth for evil.

Let us be inspired by this week's discussion to dedicate and rededicate ourselves to avoiding speaking bad about others. A simple rule to remember is a statement which has helped many:

"Don't mention mentschen (people)." If we avoid talking about others, we will avoid most forms of Lashon Horah. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**