

L'shon hara



L'shon hara is any speech about someone that you would not say to them directly, and any speech that makes someone seem bad, or infers a negative motivation for their actions.

For example, saying: "Sarah is so scatterbrained, she never get's anything done." or "Rivkah really dislikes Mike, that's why did didn't go to the birthday party."

It is not even necessary to mention someone by name for it to be L'shon hara, if you imply one person or generally speak of a group of people.

L'shon hara is also any negative speech that is unnecessary. Speaking ill of anything that does not protect life or property.

As an example –Saying: "Carrots are disgusting!", "That house is ugly." or "Her cookies look gross."

"But, It's True!" Is it still L'shon hara?

"In any case, she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife."

~Bereshit 20:12

L'shon hara is not speaking the whole truth. People like to justify L'shon hara with the ugly excuse, "But it's true!" Avimelech was upset with Avraham for having claimed that Sarah was his sister, for though his statement was true, its incompleteness nearly caused Avimelech to sin, a sin that would have caused Avimelech's entire kingdom to be destroyed. Even though Avraham was truthful in his remark, the fact that it was true did not negate harmful repercussions of not speaking the whole truth: that Sarah was his sister *and his wife*. The wife part being the most relevant information to Avimelech who wanted Sarah to be his wife.

L'shon hara is gossip whether it is true or not. Everyone can find an examples in their life of "true statements" that cause harm and hurt to others. People often repeat information unnecessarily – information that, although it is true, does serious damage to the subject of the gossip. Even if on the surface a statement appears to be true, nothing that we can ever know or speak is the whole TRUTH from G-D's perspective.

L'shon hara is bad news. The rabbi's tell us that publicizing bad news is a foolish act, *EVEN* if the information is true. So unless someone asks about a certain event, or about some other item of bad news, if the information is not important for them to know, (it could cause harm to them for example: "The bridge is out." or "There is a snake on that path.") it is better to not talk about it at all.

L'shon hara is publically calling attention to someone's failure. In the same way, if someone is sinning (doing something against Torah), and you see it, it is preferable to remain silent (unless waiting will bring them immediate harm) and not attempt to correct them by shouting out their sin. Only take them aside and correct them privately per the model shown in Mattiyahu 18:15-17

Since we can never know the full truth of a situation, the way G-D sees the whole truth, we must not speak in a negative way unless it is to preserve someone's health, life, or property. Which comes down to:

If you cannot say anything nice, do not say anything at all.



"But, who cares!" Doesn't everyone talk trash all day long?

⁸"I speak with him face to face, plainly and not in riddles. He even looks at the form of Adonai! Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" ⁹Adonai's anger burned against them, and He left them. ¹⁰When the cloud lifted up from above the Tent, behold, Miriam had tza'arat, like snow! As Aaron turned toward her, behold, she had tza'arat!

~Bamidbar 12:8-10

Our sages often equate the condition of Tzara'at with the sin of L'shon hara: Why?

In Bamidbar 12:1-16 We see Miriam is punished severely for speaking against Moshe: Do you believe that we are similarly stricken today? How do we know that, since we do not know exactly what tzara'at was? We are told though some of the evil that the tongue produces.

⁴See also the ships—though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member—yet it boasts of great things. See how so small a fire sets a blaze so great a forest! ⁶And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is a world of evil placed among our body parts. It pollutes the whole body and sets on fire the course of life—and is set on fire by Gehenna. ⁷For every species of beasts and birds, reptiles and sea creatures, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Adonai and Father, and with it we curse people, who are made in the image of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be. ¹¹A spring doesn't pour out fresh and bitter water from the same opening, does it? ¹²My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh water.

~Ya'akov 3:4-12

Forest fires! World's of Evil! Untamed, restless, and full of deadly poison! Not exactly a glowing recommendation. Imagine you were interviewing someone to take care of your beloved pet, would you hire them if those are the phrases they used to describe themselves? No? Why not? Would you want such a person loose in the world at all? And yet would you say: "Who cares?" Would you want to be like that yourself?

People really underestimate the power of their words, underestimate the very real harm they are doing to themselves as they allow their tongue to run feral and untamed creating nightmare after nightmare after nightmare in their lives. Do you know someone like this? Someone who is constantly speaking negatively? Maybe they blame everyone but themselves for their problems. Maybe they never have anything nice to say. Maybe they are always complaining. Maybe it seems like their life is always in chaos, always in trouble, like they NEVER have peace. Maybe the closer you look at people the more you will see the truth in Torah, the truth that those who follow it know. Within the words, within the wisdom of Torah, there is a great peace, a great shalom for those that walk in it's TRUTH.