

This shall be the law of the Metzora. (14:2)

There is a famous *Chassidic* tale which addresses the ramifications of *lashon hara*, slanderous speech, that is well worth repeating: In a small town in Eastern Europe a fine man lived who had one failing: he talked too much. He was well-liked and, thus, successful in his business endeavor. The problem was that when one is successful due to his personality, obviously a lot of talking is involved. Inevitably, it leads to talking about people, with the details often embellished to garner greater interest. This is *lashon hara*. Otherwise, the fellow was a real “nice guy.”

One day, this “nice guy” went too far. He discovered something about a fellow Jew. It was not terrible, but interesting enough that he could not wait to share it with a couple of dozen of his closest friends. Each time he related the information, he enhanced it slightly. Within a few days the entire town was aware of this *lashon hara* about another businessman. People refrained from visiting his business. His reputation was ruined – all because of a little *lashon hara*, coupled with a lot of simple-minded people.

The heartbroken victim of this senseless slander went to the town’s *Rav* and complained. At least, the *Rav* should relate to Mr. “Nice Guy” the effect of his slander. The *Rav* called in the *baal lashon hara*, who now felt terrible. What could he do to atone for his misdeeds? “*Rebbe*, I will do anything that you ask of me,” the man said. He was sincerely distraught. He had never meant to hurt anyone. He was just having fun – at someone else’s expense – but, regrettably, this is something we rarely realize until it is too late.

The *Rav* looked at him and said, “Bring me a feather pillow.” “How many do you want? *Rebbe*, I will bring you a whole box of pillows, if that is what it takes,” the man replied.

“No, one pillow will do,” the *Rav* answered.

The man returned later with a feather pillow, “Here, *Rebbe*, now, what should I do?”

The *Rav* said, “Slice open the pillow.” The man promptly slit open the pillow, allowing for the light feathers to swirl everywhere. In fact, many of them flew out the open window. Ten minutes went by, and the *Rav* said, “Now, bring back **all** the feathers and place them back in the pillow. Not a single one may be missing!”

The man stared at the *Rav* in disbelief. “*Rebbe*, it is impossible. Once the feathers fly out, they are gone. Who knows where the wind carried them?”

“Now you understand the seriousness of *lashon hara*. Once gossip, a rumor, a secret, leaves your mouth, you have no idea where it will end up. It is no different from the feathers of the pillow.”

The man was told to apologize to his victim and to everyone whom he had included in his *lashon*

hara. He was also “encouraged” to study the laws pertaining to this most common of sins.