

This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification. (14:2)

Probably more has been written concerning the sin of *lashon hora* than any other *aveirah*. Its common occurrence is due to human failing. Veritably, the only way to protect oneself from falling prey to the abyss of *lashon hora* is not to speak. Two powerful vignettes inspire one to think twice before he speaks ill of others. A young man came to the saintly *Horav Shloimke, zl, m'Zevhill*, and petitioned the *Rebbe* for a blessing. He and his wife had been married for a considerable amount of time and had yet to be blessed with a child. They were broken-hearted. The man could not stop weeping. "Please *Rebbe*," he begged, "intercede on our behalf."

The *Rebbe* sat and ruminated over the man's request. After a few moments, he looked up and said, "You ask that I 'guarantee' you a child. I am prepared to pray on your behalf. I have, however, one contingency with which you must comply. If you agree to my request, I will agree to yours." The man immediately acquiesced without asking to hear what the *Rebbe* was demanding of him.

The *Rebbe* then presented the conditions upon which his prayers were contingent. "I hear that you are among the most talkative members of the *mikveh* crowd. You should no longer speak in the *mikveh*. Second, I hear that your love of conversation is not exclusive to the *mikveh*. You seem to enjoy carrying on conversations wherever you go, and apparently you are among the most outspoken. Last, I understand that your desire to speak extends to the *shul*. Therefore, I ask that you no longer speak in the *mikveh* or outside the *mikveh* wherever people congregate, and that the *shul* remain a place where the only conversation is between man and Hashem. If you do so, I will pray for you."

The man listened. After all, he wanted a child, and he had given his word. His friends could not fathom his transformation. He did not speak. He changed from being one of those who was the life of the party to someone who appeared to have lost his voice. This made some people think that he had suffered a breakdown. One year later, his wife gave birth to a healthy baby boy. After the *bris*, the father asked the *Rebbe* wherein lay the *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure. What does not speaking have to do with being blessed with a child?

The *Rebbe* explained, "It is quoted in the name of *Horav Pinchas Koritzer, zl*, that Hashem grants every person a specific measure of *hanaah*, pleasure. When you speak in the *mikveh*, street or *shul*, you derive pleasure from all the attention you receive. In addition, you have an opinion concerning individuals which you take great pleasure in sharing with others. You are quickly reaching the total pleasure allotted to you. This will prevent you from having the great pleasure of being a father. Since you ceased using speaking as your avenue for deriving pleasure, I was able to direct your pleasure source to parenthood."

One more incredible insight from *Horav Aizik Sher, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Slabodka*. One of his *talmidim* approached him seeking advice on how to cope with the *yetzer hora*. This was an otherwise fine student who excelled in all areas of learning and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. He claimed that he could overcome other physical challenges, but the “sweetness” of *lashon hora*, especially when he had a “scoop” of which no one else was aware, was very difficult to suppress.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* said, “Your father visited me two weeks ago. He made an excellent impression. He appears to be a gentleman and a scholar. Tell me – do you speak *lashon hora* against your father?” “Absolutely not. I have no compelling desire to speak against my father,” he replied. “Do you sense a contradiction between your desire to speak and the fact that he is your father?” The *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. “No,” the young man replied. “I have no desire to speak about my father.”

“Is it because your father has no failings?” “*Rebbe*, there is no such person who has no shortcomings. My father is not perfect. Nonetheless, I will not speak against him. Furthermore, if I even sense that someone might make a derogatory statement about my father, I immediately distance myself from him.”

When the *Rosh Yeshivah* heard this, he immediately countered, “To what do you attribute this lack of inclination to speak *lashon hora* against your father?” “I will not speak against my father because I love him. When I do not want to speak – I do not speak. My father is special to me.”

“If this is the case,” said the *Rosh Yeshivah*,” your problem is solved. You seek direction in how to overcome the desire to speak ill of others? Love them! If you love someone, you will not speak against him. Your problem is solved. One does not speak negatively of someone he loves.”