



Honorable Mentchen: Gossip Busters

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

A good rule to remember to avoid *lashon hara*, is to try to spend less time talking about others and more time focusing on oneself. Ultimately, there's only one person in the world we can improve, ourselves. Rav Yisrael Salanter once said, "If you gave a talk and only one person improved, it was worthwhile even if that one person was yourself." If you point your finger at someone else, you're pointing three fingers at yourself. Before you critique others, see how you can improve yourself.

The Chafetz Chaim teaches that if someone tells you something, you must assume it's confidential unless it's very obvious that it's public information. When you are in possession of scandalous information, it's difficult not to spread it, but that's no excuse. Giving information about others demands the same kind of discretion expected from a lawyer or a medical professional. A primary reason people

gossip is to lower the image of the person they are speaking about so they can raise themselves up in the process. People usually like to pick on those of higher social stature. Often the desire to bad mouth and betray secrets is not fed by hostility but rather insecurity and wanting people to think one is important and in the know.

The muscle we exercise the most is our tongue and learning to control it is very difficult. But mastering self-discipline is important not only in the area of *lashon hara* but in becoming an overall better person. Observing the laws of *lashon hara* demands good judgment. The same thing taken out of context can be damaging or praiseworthy. A \$250 donation to charity by a person of modest means can be impressive. Telling someone else that a multi-millionaire gave \$250 can be character assassination. We must think before we speak and analyze the way our words will be understood – before we

speak them.

If someone has a grievance against another, trying to take revenge and diminishing the person's reputation is immoral and tactically wrong. The fair thing to do is to speak directly to the person. Don't exaggerate the wrong that's been done. Don't do things that will provoke wrath. If you attempt to smear someone's name, invariably the person will learn about it and the disagreement will get worse. What could have been a small fight becomes a conflagration.

Many of the primary motives of speaking *lashon hara* are undesirable character traits. The Kotzker Rebbe quotes the Gemara, "It's not the rat who is the thief, but the hole that is the thief." If there wouldn't be a hole for the rat to run away to, it wouldn't be able to steal the cheese. If we refuse to be an audience for those who speak forbidden speech, we can in our own way stem the tide of *lashon hara*.

The Power of The Soul: Becoming Whole

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Eliezer Miller

In his explanation on Shir Hashirim, the Gra asks, why doesn't the Torah mention the reward a person will receive in the World To Come? He answers that the main purpose of *olam habah* is for the soul to return to its source and to cleave to the *Shechina*. When a person does a *mitzvah* and enables the *Shechina* to rest within him in this world, that is the greatest reward. We learn from the Gra that the *deveikut* (cleaving) of the soul in this world is more desirable than the *deveikut* of the soul in the next world. Man actualizes his reason for creation by preparing himself to be a place for the Divine Presence to rest and creating a *nachat ruach* (divine pleasure) for Hashem.

The Sefat Emet in Ki Teitzei says that the 248 limbs and organs of a person correspond to the soul of a person. When a Jew does a good deed he directs a glow from his soul to his body. Similarly, the extent to which a person prepares himself during the six days of the week to accept the *neshama yeteirah* (additional soul) on Shabbat, that is how much it will be able to expand inside him. On Shabbat in *Mincha* we say, "*Menucha sheleima she'ata rotze bah.*" The more the *Shechina* finds rest in a person on Shabbat,

the more the person will feel true peace.

Our purpose on this world is to connect the inner spark to its higher source. When a person sins, he distances himself from Hashem. Sin creates a partition around the heart so that the person cannot sense his inner spark. Yet the verse states, "*Ki lo yitosh Hashem amo.*" Hashem will never leave us. The eternal spark will remain forever inside us despite our many sins.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the *sitra achra* (forces of impurity) are sustained by *kedusha* (holiness). When Hashem hides His light, the *yetzer hara* doesn't have energy and becomes weaker. The Arvei Nachal notes that Hashem's kindness allows this blockage to form. If the sinner would remain at his original level, he wouldn't survive. When he sins, he falls so that he can continue to live and have the chance to repent. The Ramaz on the Zohar says that the *yetzer hara*'s power comes from the attribute of *gevurah* (strength) which is contained in the world of holiness. One can sweeten it's strength with the force of *Torah* and *chesed*.

Hashem chose *Klal Yisrael* when they were on the 49th level of impurity because He wanted

to show that even at our lowest point, He will never leave us. When Yaakov went down to Egypt, Hashem assuaged his fears and said, "I will come down with you and come up with you, and your children will be a great nation." The commentators explain that Yaakov was afraid his children would be negatively affected by the impurity of Egypt and that the *Shechina* would depart from them. Hashem promised Yaakov that not only would He be with his descendants but that Yaakov would be the root of the soul of *Klal Yisrael*. However low a Jew may fall, in whatever situation he is in, the image of Yaakov contained in his inner spark will remain with him.

Why did Hashem specifically promise Yaakov this? Yaakov symbolizes truth and the power of Torah. The central link that connects the Jewish people with Hashem is Torah and *mitzvot*. The Zohar in Devarim says that in the merit of Torah, *Klal Yisrael* will be redeemed from exile. The *keruvim* in the Holy of Holies resembled a male corresponding to the *Shechina* and a female corresponding to *Knesset Yisrael*. The base that held them up was the ark with the Torah inside. The Torah bonds a Jew to Hashem and will ultimately bring us back to our eternal inner spark.



In the Merit of Righteous Women: Chana Part 2A

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Chana was a righteous woman worthy of prophecy. Her husband, Elkanah, was a *tzadik*. In those days polygamy was a normal response to childlessness. The husband could remain married to his first wife while still having children with his second wife. Penina, Elkanah's second wife, tried to encourage Chana to pray for children by taunting her. Chana was hurt but she was finally aroused when Elkanah said, "Am I not better to you than ten children?" Then Chana realized that she had been overly dependent on her husband and that her desire for a child was in a different place than his. He had come to a point of acceptance while she still yearned for a child. Until now she was sad and depressed. Now she became bitter and rose up to do battle.

Her first line of attack was *tefilah*. Prayer is a war against ego, desire, and self-reliance. The *navi* says, "She prayed a lot to Hashem." We learn from this that prayer is a process. She wasn't answered after one passionate plea. She needed to ask again and again because each time a person prays for something he enforces his sense of dependency on Hashem. Each prayer changes a person and opens him towards receiving what he is asking for. However, one must be wary of the trap of thinking one can manipulate Hashem through prayer. Harbeh *tefilah* means complete reliance on the One Above, while relying on the method of prayer can take a person away from Hashem.

The Navi says, "*V'Chana hi midaberet el libah.*" (Chana spoke to her heart.) Chana's lips were moving and her voice was audible to her own ears, although not loud enough for others to hear. She was the first person to pray in this way and we learn the *halacha* of praying *shemoneh esrei* from her. The Maharal explains that voice is the bond between the body and soul. In order to speak, you need thought and feeling. But you also need the five parts of speech: the lips, tongue, teeth, larynx, and palate to verbally express those thoughts in physically generated speech. Praying *shemoneh esrei* out loud shows a lack of faith. Moving your lips so that no one hears, makes it clear in your mind that *tefilah* goes above this world. We want to recognize that there is a place beyond our voice and expression of self where prayer is heard. Praying in this manner affirms one's belief in Hashem.

Eli was a direct descendant of Itamar, the son of Aharon. The very day Chana came to the *mishkan*, he got the appointment to become *kohen gadol*. He was the first descendant of Itamar to reach this position. Therefore, his vigilance on this day was greater than normal. It was forbidden to be drunk in the *mishkan*. Drunkenness clouds the brain and causes a person's inhibitions to loosen. A person's mind gives him the ability to connect.

A drunken person in the *mishkan* was paradoxical. The *mishkan* was a place to bond with Hashem while drunkenness took

one away from that. Eli said to Chana, "Until when will you be drunk? Remove your wine from yourself." He spoke harshly to her because he was so offended by her state. While most of us would have readily jumped to conclusions, he cared enough before making a judgment to inquire of the *urim v'tumim* (stones on the breastplate). The letters lit up *kisheira*, a proper person. But Eli's eyes read *shikora* (a drunken woman). This is why he judged her so severely.

Chana replied, "No my master, I'm a person of hard spirit and I had no wine or liquor. I'm pouring my heart out before Hashem." This in fact is the definition of *tefilah*. You have to find your soul, where you really are, and pour it out. She goes on to say, "Don't view me as *bli ol*, without responsibility, so that my yearning for a child took me to do wrong. I'm fully aware of Hashem and the honor that should be given to the *mishkan*. This is what prayer is supposed to be about."

This takes us to another question, is prayer meant to be decorous or not? *Shemoneh Esrei* must be quiet and restrained. But other parts of prayer don't have to be so. In *Tehilim* we find ten different expressions for *tefilah* and some of them are quiet dramatic. For example, it says, "*Koli el Hashem ezak.*" (My voice screams out to Hashem.) Prayer should be passionate and an outpouring of the soul.