

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
BEHA'ALOSCHA

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

THAT'S SAYING ALOT!

Towards the end of *Parshas Beha'aloscha* we find a surprising interaction between Aharon and Miriam, the siblings of *Moshe Rabbeinu*.¹ Miriam expressed some surprise at Moshe's conduct, and consulted Aharon about the matter. However, since her words were potentially hurtful to Moshe, she was guilty of speaking *Lashon Harah* - 'evil talk.' Hashem Himself confronted Miriam and Aharon and asked, "Why were you not afraid to speak about my servant, about Moshe?"

Rashi² identifies what seems to be imprecise language in the *passuk*. Why does the *passuk* say, "...about my servant, about Moshe," when 'my servant Moshe' would have sufficed? Rashi explains that Hashem was pointing out two separate errors on Miriam's part — she spoke about Moshe, and she spoke about a servant of Hashem.

By speaking about Moshe, she violated the laws of *Lashon Harah*, which apply to every person in *Klal Yisrael*. But Moshe Rabbeinu was not just any other person, he had a particular role in *Klal Yisrael*. He was known to all as Hashem's messenger, handpicked from the nation, to lead the *Bnei Yisrael* out of *Mitzrayim*, and to receive the Torah at *Har Sinai*. That alone should have given Miriam pause before speaking improperly about such a man. Thus, Hashem admonished Miriam on two accounts, about Moshe, and about Hashem's servant.

The Chofetz Chaim (R' Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan, 1838-1933), in the introduction to his eponymous *sefer*, delineates no less than thirty-one separate *mitzvos* that one may possibly violate while speaking ill of another person. *Lashon Harah* is so insidious, as it doesn't involve any physical effort, just simply speaking, yet one can rack up the violations in no time.

Conversely, one who chooses to refrain from *Lashon Harah* will be rewarded for all of the transgressions they avoided, and all of the *mitzvos* they kept. What an amazing opportunity, and sometimes all it takes is a bit of silence.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Speaking is natural, and often comes without a thought. It can be very difficult to be on guard against all the laws of improper speech, and anyways, sometimes it's just a harmless comment, right? With this in mind, how does one come to appreciate the beauty of guarding one's speech?

One surefire way is to learn the laws as best as one can.¹ When we know that avoiding gossip is not just a nice thing, but the desire of Hashem, it helps us rise above our petty interactions, turning every conversation into something holy. However, this is only possible if one knows the laws.

Additionally, by studying them diligently, the laws of speech naturally become more important in one's eyes. We come to feel an affinity to these laws, and will regard them as guideposts that help us navigate the turbulent waters of everyday relationships.

And, of course, by studying the laws of speech, we will know when we are obligated to speak up. Knowing this distinction will spell the difference between using our words to be a villain or a hero.

¹ *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 7

¹ *Bamidbar* 12:1-16

² *Badmibar* 12:8 s.v. בעבדי במשה

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People attribute my achievements in *Tikkun HaMiddos* to a natural predisposition, assuming that I was born righteous. If only they knew the truth; I've toiled mightily to raise myself above my earthly impulses and base desires. - Related by *Mirrer Mashgiach*, R' Chatzel Levenstein zt"l to his daughter, *MiMizrach Shemesh* pg.199 vol. 4, pg. 27 (Biographical section)

SECRET SCHEMES

Shortly after he was married, the Sdei Chemed* (R' Chizkiyahu Medini 1835-1908) was accepted into an exclusive *kollel*, funded by the wealthy philanthropist, R' Zorach.

There was a young man in the neighborhood who had a hatred for those who study Torah and devised a scheme to humiliate and disgrace the most prominent scholar of the group, R' Chizkiyahu.

R' Zorach had a maid who did his household chores, and, as part of her duties she was required to tidy up the synagogue where the *kollel* studied. She cleaned up very early in the morning before anyone was due to arrive so as not to disrupt the men's learning. Usually, only R' Chizkiyahu was learning that early in the morning.

After being paid handsomely, the maid came shrieking out of the synagogue much to the shock of the people about to enter, claiming the young man committed a heinous crime.

A commotion started and as she continued her tirade the young schemer began shouting that R' Chizkiyahu should be thrown out of the *kollel*. Others joined the battle cry and soon there was a mob marching to the home of R' Zorach to let him know what had transpired.

R' Zorach was not home, but his wife assured the group that he would come to the synagogue as soon as he could. When R' Zorach arrived at the *kollel*, he could find no evidence of the earlier uproar — the students were learning diligently as always. After a while R' Zorach announced, "I don't for a moment believe one word of the maid's vicious accusation. R' Chizkiyahu stays in the *kollel*, and my maid is fired!"

After a few months the maid's money ran out and she needed a job. After this controversy, she simply couldn't find employment. One early morning she came to the synagogue to talk to R' Chizkiyahu.

"I need your help," she pleaded. "I have no more money and I need a job. You know that what I said about you was a lie. I am truly sorry that I accused you falsely. In truth I did it because I was offered a large sum of money, and I couldn't resist the temptation. The money is gone now, and I'm willing to go to R' Zorach to admit the truth. Please help me."

R' Chizkiyahu was so shocked that he could hardly believe what he was hearing. He considered his options — on the one hand it was a desecration of Hashem's name for a person learning in *kollel* to be accused of such things. On the other hand, if he now revealed the plot, that would clear his name, but again there would be a *chillul Hashem* when it is known that one Jew could perpetuate such an act against another. And so, the S'dei Chemed thought, what did Hashem gain? As for him clearing his name, it would end up bringing shame to the scheming young man.

R' Chizkiyahu, though, decided to help the maid in a different way, convincing another person in the community to hire her. And in the S'dei Chemed's words, "When I walked out of that man's home after he agreed to hire the maid I felt as if my mind had opened wide and Hashem had rewarded me with knowledge of the entire Torah, all because I was concerned only with Hashem's honor and not with my own."

**"...I felt as if
my mind had
opened wide..."**

**Adapted from "The Maggid Speaks," by R' Paysach Krohn*

DID YOU KNOW?

- All Miriam did was equate Moshe to all other prophets! Yet, since it was downgrading Moshe's stature, Miriam was admonished by Hashem.¹

¹ *Sifri Bamidbar* 99:1

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