



Guarding the Tongue

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The Scriptures used in this article are:

- The Complete Jewish Bible (CJB),*
translated by David H. Stern,
Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.,
Clarksville, MD/Jerusalem, 1998.
- The Open Bible (New King James Version [NKJV]),*
Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, 1985.
- Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures, (TNK),*
The Jewish Publication Society,
Philadelphia/New York, 1988.

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Chapter One

The Good Life

Do you desire life? Would you like to see many 'good' days? Of course you would. Everyone wants to live a good life, and there is a way to do it no matter what may be your age, gender, health, financial status or position in life, for it is written:

**"Who is the man who desires life,
And loves many days, that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking guile.
Depart from evil, and do good;
Seek peace, and pursue it." (Psalm 34:12-14)**

The way to achieve the 'good life' is really very simple, however, that does not mean it is easy. In fact, one of the chief requirements for reaching the 'good life' is that we bring into submission that member of our body which is most difficult to control, our tongue. To do this means that we must also learn to control another part of our body, our mind, for our tongue only speaks what is in our mind and heart. As *Yeshua* said:

"Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matt. 12:34)

You may ask, just how can I bring my mind (and tongue) under control? Well, take heart, for if you are one who truly believes in the Creator God (the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and who looks to the Scriptures for guidance, and if you are diligently seeking to follow the instructions found in the *Torah*, then you are already tuned into the manner of living that produces the 'good life.'

In addition to learning to follow the *Torah*, one who 'desires life' must also allow themselves to be led by the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Rue-ahk Hah Koh-desh = The Holy Spirit). For the *Ruach* (Spirit) will always lead us in a way of life that is in total harmony with the *Torah*, and will help us to manifest righteous characteristics in our lives. These characteristics are likened in Scripture to 'good fruit':

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." (Gal. 5:22-26)

While living the 'good life' may not be easy, it really is very clear and quite simple what we must do to achieve it. If we truly are Believers in, and followers of *Yeshua HaMashiach* (Yeh-shoe'-ah Hah Mah-she'-ach = Jesus the Messiah), we will desire to live righteously before the Father just as He did, although we will continue in our struggle against our carnal sinful nature even as did the Apostle Paul (*Shaul* = Shaw-ool or Saul), who wrote of his struggle with sin:

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." (Rom. 7:14-15)

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." (Rom. 7:24-25)

There are usually many changes that new Believers must make in order to bring their life into compliance with the instructions found in the *Torah*. Such changes may involve things like ridding our lives of idols, cleaning

up our speech habits, and learning to be truthful and kind. These (and many others) are very real and necessary areas where change must be made, as *Shaul* made clear when he wrote to the Thessalonians:

"Therefore brothers, just as you learned from us how you had to live in order to please God, and just as you are living this way now, we ask you -- indeed, united with the Lord Yeshua, we urge you -- to keep doing so more and more. ... What God wants is that you be holy... For God did not call us to live an unclean life but a holy one."

(I Thess. 4:1, 3,7 CJB)

As we learn to live holy lives there is one area which often does not get changed along with the others. That has to do with the manner in which we talk about other people. It appears that *Shaul* also addressed this issue as he continued his letter to the Thessalonians:

"Concerning love for the brothers we do not need to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other; and you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do it even more.

"Also, make it your ambition to live quietly, to mind your own business and to earn your living by your own efforts -- just as we told you. Then your daily life will gain the respect of outsiders, and you will not be dependent on anyone." (I Thess. 4:9-12 CJB)

The apostle Peter, also addressed this issue:

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious." (I Pet. 2:1-3)

~ Sin and Leprosy ~

The 97-5 issue of *Hebrew Roots* contained an article entitled; *Sin and Leprosy* (write for a free copy). In it we discussed the ten sins which tradition and scripture say were punishable (in the days of the Tabernacle and the Temple) by the disease of leprosy. While God does not currently punish sinners through the agency of physical leprosy, it is our contention that sin does manifest itself today in the form of 'spiritual leprosy,' and that the Bride of Messiah (the church of called out ones) is currently in a spiritually leprous state due to the sins which still beset her, especially the sin of speaking evil of others. This may be one of the primary reasons why the spiritual gifts found in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 are so lacking in today's church. One of the main objectives of *Hebrew Roots* is to assist the Bride in identifying those areas in which she has need for spiritual cleansing, so she can properly prepare for her soon coming wedding to her long awaited Messiah, *Yeshua* (Jesus).

With this in mind we will now zero in on the one specific sin (of the ten mentioned in the previous article) which is said to have been always punishable by leprosy during 'Bible times.'

~ Lashon Hara ~

The sin in question is called, in Hebrew, *Lashon Hara* (Lah-shown' Hah-rah' = the evil tongue). It is said that if a person can overcome the carnal tendency to speak *lashon hara* it proves they are able to control all of their other sinful appetites, for the tongue is the most difficult of all body members to control and is the quickest to rise up in a sinful manner:

**"Whoever guards his mouth and tongue
Keeps his soul from troubles." (Prov. 21:23)**

While the scriptures abound with passages and verses that warn us about the tendency of the tongue to speak evil and get us into trouble, they also tell us that if a person can control the tongue, so that they only speak good, their speech can become a veritable 'tree of life' to them:

**"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life,
But perverseness in it breaks the spirit." (Prov. 15:4)**

The tongue then, is a most powerful weapon that can be used for either good or for evil. Since the Bride of Messiah still resides in the home (this world) of her evil former father, *HaSatan* (Hah' Sah-tahn' = Satan the Devil), she is still prone to use her tongue in the evil manner she learned before she became betrothed to her Husband, *Yeshua*. However, now that the Bride has been brought into the family of *HaShem* (Hah Shem' = 'the name,' or

YHVH), she should no longer be using her tongue in the old evil way, even though she still resides in this evil world among unconverted people.

It was James, the half brother of *Yeshua* (his real name was *Ya'acov* [Yah-ah-cove or Jacob]), who made the definitive scriptural statement about the difficulties encountered when dealing with the tongue:

"For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at the ships, although they are so large and are driven of fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

"Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. Behold, how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

"For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

"Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring *can* yield both salt water and fresh." (James 3:2-12)

Ya'acov is telling us that our tongues can be used for either good or evil, but should not be used for both. Therefore, when one does succumb to speaking evil, those words, by nature, negate all the good that may have been previously spoken. For, just as the murderer is powerless to bring his victim back to life, so also the one who murders with his tongue can never erase the loveless words that were spoken, or resurrect the righteous reputation that they have maimed or destroyed.

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Chapter Two

What Is Lashon Hara?

It is easy to give a general definition of *lashon hara* by saying that it is speaking evil with the tongue. But the truth of the matter is that *lashon hara* is more than just speaking evil. In actual fact, *lashon hara* is speaking anything (including truth) that will bring any type of hurt or loss to another person.

To fully understand this concept it is necessary to begin with a different word and concept. That word is *mitzvah* (meets'-vah), and it literally means 'commandment.' Abraham was promised that his descendants would be like the "stars of the heavens:"

"...because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge (*mishmereth*), My commandments (*mitzvah*), My statutes (*chukaw*), and My laws (*torah*)." (Gen. 26:5)

It is significant to note that *HaShem* (*YHVH*) did not use the word *mitzvah* (or *mitzvot* = plural form) in Scripture to describe the 'Ten Commandments.' There, the Hebrew word translated as 'commandments' is actually the word *davar* (dah-vahr'), and literally means 'words.' Thus, in English it would be more correct to call the 'Ten Commandments' the 'Ten Words.' This is how they are known in the Hebrew world:

"...And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments (*davar* = words)." (Ex. 34:28)

Mitzvah implies more than just commandments. It also carries the connotation of doing 'good deeds.' Thus, when a person observes a scriptural commandment they are also doing a 'good deed.' Likewise, when a person performs a 'good deed' they are, in some way, fulfilling a 'commandment.' In Hebrew thought, 'good deeds' and 'commandments' are inseparable. It is by performing *mitzvot* that we build spiritual muscle, for their performance can be likened to spiritual exercise. The more *mitzvot* we perform today, the stronger we will become spiritually, and as a result we will be able to perform even more *mitzvot* tomorrow.

Our focus then, in preparing ourselves as a Bride for her wedding, is to be continually performing 'spiritual exercise.' By so doing, we build our spiritual character and become clothed in righteousness, the very garment which the Bride is to wear for her wedding to Messiah *Yeshua*:

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (Rev. 19:7-8)

It is said that by merely guarding our speech one can perform up to thirty-one different *mitzvot* (commandments or 'good deeds'). What a marvelous way to condition ourselves spiritually while preparing for our wedding.

The Jewish sages have developed a very complete teaching about what constitutes *lashon hara*. It is part of Jewish *halacha* (hah-lah-cah') or traditional law, and it literally means "the way one walks." In other words, *halacha* is a way of life, based primarily on the Scriptures. *Shaul* (the apostle Paul) taught *halacha* that was central to the Believing community:

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14)

An important question with which every modern Believer must deal is this: How did the *halacha* or 'the Way' taught by *Shaul* differ from the *halacha* or 'the Way' that was taught in the Jewish synagogues of that day? The chief difference was their belief that *Yeshua* was the promised *Mashiach* (Messiah) and that He had been crucified and resurrected from the dead. In addition, there were some differences in their interpretation of the oral traditions. But let us give *Shaul* the privilege of answering this question himself:

"And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: 'Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner

from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death." (Acts 28:17-18)

Notice that *Shaul* is not speaking to the Believing community in this passage, but to the Jewish Rabbis of the Roman synagogues. He clearly states that He has done nothing contrary to "...the customs of our fathers..."

Although there are rare exceptions when it is actually required that we speak *lashon hara*, for the most part it is a grievous sin. While today we, as Believers, are not under the rule of modern Jewish *halacha*, it is evident from studying their teachings on the matter of *lashon hara* that if we were to follow their guidelines we would seldom, if ever, hurt another person through improper speech.

The following teachings on *lashon hara* are taken from modern Jewish *halacha*. There are two primary examples of *lashon hara* which need to be avoided:

- ◆ Making a remark that in any way puts down or belittles another person.
- ◆ Making a remark which causes another person to feel bad or be hurt physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or financially.

Some important points to know about *lashon hara* are:

- ◆ A statement is *lashon hara* if it hurts the feelings of the other person, even though nothing actually 'derogatory' was said.
- ◆ *Lashon hara* is not confined to the spoken word. Writing, hinting, or even facial expressions can all be used to communicate *lashon hara*.
- ◆ A story about another person can be *lashon hara* even if one does not mention any names, for someone may be able to figure out to whom you are referring.
- ◆ You may not belittle another person even if no damage would be caused because you know the listener would not believe your report.
- ◆ Repeating a story that belittles another is *lashon hara* even if the story is public knowledge.
- ◆ Even if the words you spoke are not technically *lashon hara*, if the result of those words has a negative effect on another person it may be classified as such.
- ◆ It is even wrong to say something derogatory about another person in a joking manner.

As you can see, *lashon hara* is both a very serious sin (punishable by leprosy in the times of the Tabernacle and Temple), and one that has wide acceptance in the world around us. Sadly, we can see that most of what passes for news in the modern media is nothing more than *lashon hara* on an international scale.

~ Willing to Be Shamed ~

Sometimes people speak *lashon hara* in order to protect themselves from being ridiculed by others, and not primarily for the purpose of putting down another person. According to the traditions associated with *lashon hara* this too is unacceptable. We may not speak *lashon hara*:

- ◆ No matter what pressure is brought to bear on us.
- ◆ No matter what we stand to lose personally.
- ◆ No matter what other people will say about us.
- ◆ No matter how people will feel about us personally.

In other words, it is a *mitzvah* to allow people to think poorly of us, rather than for us to bring shame or ridicule upon another person, even if they have done something wrong. It is far better to suffer the arrows of shame for another person rather than put them to shame, especially if that person is a brother or sister in the Faith, for it is written:

**"A friend loves at all times,
And a brother is born for adversity." (Prov. 17:17)**

So, if we are a mature brother/sister in Messiah, we will even suffer shame in another's place. It is bad enough to speak in a way that puts some one down, but it is even worse if what one says creates a bad name for another person.

PLEASE REMEMBER: IF THE WORDS YOU SPEAK HURT ANOTHER PERSON IN ANY WAY, YOU HAVE JUST SPOKEN *LASHON HARA*.

Consider the following statement: "The book he has written is really quite good for a person with an IQ of 80."

Now if the author in question actually had an IQ of 80, then the remark could conceivably be taken as a compliment. But, if it was obvious to everyone who heard the statement that it was meant as a put down even though the comment was spoken in a joking manner, although the statement did not inflict physical or monetary damage on the other person, it was still a case of *lashon hara*, for it was belittling and could very well have inflicted emotional (and quite possibly psychological) hurt upon the other person.

~ Listening to Lashon Hara ~

With the exception of rare occasions which will be addressed in Chapter 4, it is not only wrong to speak *lashon hara*, it is also a sin to listen to it. In fact, if a speaker has no audience for their hurtful words they will be less likely to continue speaking them. A good principle to follow is this:

ANYTHING THAT IS FORBIDDEN TO SAY IS ALSO FORBIDDEN TO HEAR.

Even if the *lashon hara* being spoken is true, we are not to listen to it because it may cause us to lower our opinion of the person about whom it is being spoken.

Sometimes it is very difficult to refrain from hearing *lashon hara* due to a particular circumstance in which we find ourselves. In such a case we may reject what we are hearing as untrue on the basis of a number of points:

- ◆ The story may be exaggerated.
- ◆ The person telling the story may have misunderstood or misinterpreted it.
- ◆ The person, being spoken of, may have acted unintentionally.
- ◆ The person, being spoken of, for some reason unknown to you, may have been justified in what they did.

In circumstances where we are unable to refrain from hearing *lashon hara*, it is best to give the object of the story the benefit of the doubt.

"You shall do no injustice in judgment. ... But in righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." (Lev. 19:15)

Remember, the way we judge others is the way in which *HaShem* (*YHVH*) will judge us. If we wish to be given the benefit of the doubt, then we need to give others the benefit of the doubt when *lashon hara* about them comes up in our presence.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matt. 7:1-2)

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Chapter Three

What Is Rechilus?

There is another form of evil which proceeds forth from the mouth of men which is considered to be even worse than *lashon hara*. This evil is called, in Hebrew, *Rechilus* (Reh-khhe'-loose). Its literal meaning is 'peddler,' like a traveling merchant selling his wares throughout the countryside.

Rechilus is used to depict someone who goes to a person and tells them what someone else has said about them. In other words, the spreader of *rechilus* listens to the slander of *lashon hara* and then reports to the person, who is the object of that slander, what has been said about them. This person is a peddler of hurtful tales.

A person may tell someone what so and so is saying about them thinking they are doing that person a favor. Nothing could be further from the truth. In actual fact they are 'slaying' that person in the spirit by reporting the slander of others.

The Scriptures warn about this unrighteous act:

"You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:16)

The major problem with speaking *rechilus* is that it causes unnecessary strife between people. This is one of the most unloving things that a person can do to a brother, and it is said to be that which *HaShem* hates more than anything else:

**"These six things the LORD hates,
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:
A proud look,
A lying tongue,
Hands that shed innocent blood,
A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that are swift in running to evil,
A false witness who speaks lies,
And one who sows discord among brethren." (Prov. 6:16-19)**

~ ~ ~

Chapter Four

Permissible Lashon Hara and Rechilus

After all of these admonitions not to speak *lashon hara* or *rechilus*, the fact of the matter is there are rare occasions when it is required to relate a matter about someone to another person. However, we must all be very careful not to use these exceptions as an excuse to fall into the habit of speaking *lashon hara*, and then try to justify what we have done just because it is permitted on occasion.

According to Jewish *Halacha* (Hah-lah-cah = the way one walks) one person you can speak against is a known *rasha* (rah-shah). A *rasha* is someone who knows that the *Torah* forbids something but does it anyway on a deliberate and regular basis. This person's lifestyle indicates that they are in open rebellion against *HaShem* (*YHVH*) and His *Torah*. However, the purpose in speaking *lashon hara* about such a person is not to hurt them, but rather to protect others and to cause the person such shame that they will confess their evil ways and return to *HaShem* in complete repentance.

However, we must not speak *lashon hara* against such a person unless we have personally gone to them first in an attempt to persuade them to change their ways. The only exception to this rule is if the person is in a position that makes it impossible for them to be contacted.

In such a case the following guidelines must be followed:

- ◆ You must have seen the sin yourself.
- ◆ You must be sure that what you saw is a sin.
- ◆ Your motivations in spreading this story must be pure. (Ridicule is not a pure motive.)
- ◆ There must be absolutely no exaggeration.
- ◆ You must be willing to confront the person face to face, even though you are unable to do so.

Another case in which it is permissible to speak *lashon hara* is when someone causes another person physical or psychological pain, steals from someone, embarrasses another person, or damages someone's property. If the offending person does not rectify the problem, it is permissible to speak *lashon hara* about them in order to warn others of possible danger from them.

Again, there are cautions that need to be heeded:

- ◆ You must not jump to conclusions, but must be absolutely positive that the person in question did the dirty deed.
- ◆ You must speak to the sinner before spreading the story. If they agree to make restitution you must not speak *lashon hara* about them.
- ◆ Your personal motivations must be absolutely pure. (Revenge is not a pure motive.)
- ◆ You must not cause them to suffer in excess of what they actually deserve.
- ◆ The *lashon hara* that you speak must be stated publicly and not as a 'whisper' campaign behind their back.

Two other cases where it is required to speak *lashon hara* about another person is if you know something about someone's future mate or business partner, and you are positive it is not already known by the individual entering into that relationship. By relating what you know, you may be saving that person from great emotional trauma or financial loss.

As you can see, there needs to be a lot of prayer involved before any *lashon hara* is communicated about another person.

~ Did Yeshua Speak Lashon Hara? ~

Yeshua had some pretty harsh things to say about some of the practices of the Scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers. But, did *Yeshua* actually speak *lashon hara* and, if He did, was it justified? Luke recorded the following occasion:

"And as He [*Yeshua*] spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner." (Luke 11:37-38)

The subject here was ritual hand washing before eating a meal. Some of the Pharisees contended that every Jew had to perform the ritual handwashing before eating, even though the *Torah* only commanded it for the Priests. This passage shows us that this particular Pharisee belonged to the School of Shammai, for that was their teaching. The more liberal School of Hillel, did not require ritual hand washing for the ordinary Jew:

"But the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.

"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them." (Luke 11:39-44)

Indeed, this is very strong language. Although it is being spoken in the privacy of a home, apparently a fair number of people are present, including some of *Yeshua's* own disciples. Therefore, *Yeshua's* words should be viewed as a public statement. Is this *lashon hara*?

It is our opinion that this is not a case of *lashon hara* because *Yeshua* is speaking directly to the people involved. Also, *Yeshua* did not begin the attack, but rather it began when they questioned him about His lack of ritual observance. Another thing to remember is that *Yeshua* spoke with authority because He had received His authority from His Father in Heaven. *Yeshua* knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the spiritual condition of these men:

"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak." (John 12:49)

Today, we Believers do not find ourselves in a similar position. Rather:

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then [*we shall see*] face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." (I Cor. 13:12)

Truly, if the Apostle Paul (*Shaul*) only knew in part, can we claim to see clearly? It is sometimes a great temptation to attack another religious person or group in the manner in which *Yeshua* confronted the Scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers. In most cases this is a grave mistake, for we have neither the knowledge nor the authority to do so. However, if you ever feel called upon to make a verbal attack on someone else's religious beliefs or actions, we recommend you do it only after much prayer and in an attitude of complete humility.

Yeshua did not speak *lashon hara* against others, but there was plenty of *lashon hara* spoken against Him. The following are two classic examples of *lashon hara*:

"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Matt. 11:18-19)

"But when the Pharisees heard it they said, 'This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.'" (Matt. 12:24)

~ The Weightier Matters ~

Our heavenly Father, *Abba*, wants each one of us to learn how to live a life that is *Torah* centered. That means our lives should conform to His expressed will. The overall principles are, that we love *HaShem* with all our hearts, and that we love our neighbors as ourselves. The temptation to speak *lashon hara* is an ever present test that proves whether we truly have learned to love our brothers and sisters in Messiah. We all need to learn how to discern the "weightier matters of the law," as *Yeshua* defined them:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith...." (Matt. 23:23)

Obviously, differences of opinion will exist as to what constitutes *lashon hara*. Other factors in personal relationships may also enter into the matter. We must take into consideration the way in which the hearer will interpret what is said. We must be very careful, whenever entering into a conversation with someone about a third party (who may or may not be present), so that what we say about that person cannot be construed in any way to be *lashon hara*. Sometimes a remark said in innocence can be interpreted by the listener somewhat differently than what was intended.

~ Belief Vs. Behavior ~

It has been said that Christianity is more concerned with what the individual believes, while Judaism is more concerned with how one behaves. In the final analysis, both of these factors are very important. *Shaul* (the Apostle Paul) addressed both belief and behavior when he said:

"...by grace you have been saved through faith, ... *it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*" (Eph. 2:8-10)

Ya'acov (James) the brother of *Yeshua* also addressed this issue when he said:

"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works,' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:18, 26)

Many people seem to believe that religion consists of going to church services or synagogue on Sabbath or Sunday, singing a few songs, reading the *Torah* or other portions of the Bible, listening to a speaker, saying or listening to some prayers, and going back home to their normal everyday life. But religion, as defined for us in the Scriptures, is quite different:

"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27)

The vast majority of Christians would probably be dumbfounded to learn that the very same *Ya'acov* (James) who wrote the above passage, and who was the undisputed leader of the early Believing Community in Jerusalem, was an orthodox Pharisee. *Ya'acov* was so highly esteemed by his fellow Jewish Pharisees that he was known among them as the 'Pious One' or 'Righteous One'. Needless to say, since *Ya'acov* was a Pharisee, he was very interested in how people 'walked the walk,' not just in how they 'talked the talk.'

Ya'acov was known to be a leader among the group of zealous Jewish Believers in *Yeshua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah), who were pointed out to the Apostle Paul during his last visit Jerusalem:

"On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; ...'" (Acts 21:18-20)

The simple fact of the matter is that we cannot divorce our behavior from our belief if we wish to live a life that is pleasing to our Father.

~ A Look at Details ~

Let us now look in more detail at those situations where speaking *lashon hara* is sometimes actually required. We are using the traditional Jewish teaching concerning these matters. It is hoped that all of our readers will understand that what is presented here is not intended to be the final word on this matter. Rather, it is intended to stimulate everyone's thinking about some very real and serious problems that exist within the Bride of Messiah (the Church). It is our belief that unless the Bride can come to grips with this compound problem of *lashon hara* and *rechilus*, she is destined to devour herself in evil speech and recrimination, for it is written:

"But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Gal. 5:15)

** A Caution **

Once again, let us reiterate that what you are about to read does not give anyone a license to say whatever they wish about whomever they want. Rather, it teaches about our duty to speak out when the situation requires that something be done.

Before performing this duty we must be sure our motives are pure. If there is any degree of personal gain, joy, or satisfaction to be acquired by speaking out, then we must go back to *HaShem* in prayer until we can do what needs to be done within our own selves, in order to come to a point of complete humbleness of spirit. This is so very important that it cannot be over emphasized.

~ All Sin is Against HaShem ~

Whenever we sin, it is first and foremost against our Creator God, whether other people are involved or not. King David expressed this point perfectly after being convicted of his sin with Bathsheba:

**"Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done *this* evil in Your sight ..."** (Psalm 51:4a)

If there was no sin, there would be no need for a Redeemer:

"But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (Gal. 3:22)

**"...For there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
(Rom. 3:22b-23)**

If sin alone was the criteria, we would all be required to speak *lashon hara* and *rechilus* against each other, for all of us have and do (from time to time) sin:

**"If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."
(I John 1:10)**

~ Types of Sin ~

There are different types of people who sin against *HaShem*, and there are varying degrees of sin. One factor that needs to be considered before deciding to speak *lashon hara*, is the degree of seriousness of the sin that has been committed. In other words, does the punishment of *lashon hara* really fit the crime?

All sin is ugly in the sight of our Father and *Yeshua*. However, the Scriptures teach that some sins are more abhorrent than others. It is not the purpose of this article to try and classify all of the various sins. That has already been attempted by various Church organizations and only leads to more controversy and dissension. Nevertheless, the Scriptures do tell us:

"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead to death*, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin *not leading to death*. There is sin *leading to death*. I do not say that he should pray about that.

"All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin *not leading to death*." (I John 5:14-17)

The sin that is "to death" is one that carries the death penalty in the *Torah*. However, there is also another type of sin that *Yeshua* said would lead to the second death:

""Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"-- because they said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" (Mark 3:28-30)

It must be remembered that all sin is first and foremost against our Creator God, the one who made us and who gives us life and breath. Whether it be rattling off a list of obscenities after hitting one's thumb with a hammer, or cheating someone by using a dishonest scale, the sin is first of all against God Himself. However, a sin against another person may carry greater weight because it is against both *HaShem* and your fellow man.

Likewise there is the matter of the degree of the committed sin. One who steals to feed their family suffers a lesser punishment (by *Torah* standards) than someone who has committed murder. The point is, God has established the rules. If someone has stolen bread, they may do it again. Likewise, if someone has committed murder they may also do it again, especially if they know there was a witness to their crime. In the first case, one needs to go to the person who stole the food and talk to them about the matter, stressing the sinfulness of stealing. Then, the individual should take it upon themselves to help furnish, or assist in finding food for that family until gainful employment can be found. In the second case, it would be foolhardy to go and tell someone that you witnessed them killing another person. Rather, one must go immediately to the authorities and report what has been witnessed.

Above all, common sense and good judgment must prevail, and if we need to, we should ask for wisdom:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5)

~ Types of Sinners ~

Now, let us look at the different types of people as defined by Jewish *halacha*:

- ◆ An observant Believer who does not sin on purpose.
- ◆ An observant Believer who possibly sins on purpose.
- ◆ An observant Believer who definitely sins on purpose.
- ◆ A *Tzadik*. (A righteous person.)
- ◆ A *Rasha*. (A wicked person.)
- ◆ A well-known *Rasha*.
- ◆ An *Apikores*. (An agnostic or atheist.)
- ◆ Someone who refuses to obey the ruling of the *Beit Din*.

All of these types of people are capable of sinning and all of them do sin from time to time. It is important to understand that how one deals with a person who has sinned may depend upon that person's overall character. It is wrong to treat a righteous person who has slipped up the same as one might have to treat a person who is a habitual sinner.

** An Observant Believer Who Does Not Sin On Purpose **

Since this person is an 'observant' Believer, it can be safely assumed that if you see this person committing a sin, it is an unusual event. This person is most likely already hurting, and therefore repenting, because they know they have sinned.

If however, the person does not realize that what they did was a sin, that fact needs to be brought to their attention. According to *halacha* this should only be done by the person against whom the sin has been committed, or by someone who has directly observed the sin. The purpose of this action is so that the sinner can face up to their sins, and go to the One who has the power to forgive sins. Rather than condemning the sinner at this point we should encourage them to repent, for it is written:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

(Heb. 4:15-16)

** An Observant Believer Who Possibly Sins On Purpose **

If the observed sin seems to be one that has been done on purpose, we must confront the sinner. It is only permissible to speak *lashon hara* about that person after they have been directly confronted and have refused to hear our testimony and to repent, as outlined in Matthew 18:15-16. Remember, the purpose and goal of speaking *lashon hara* must always be to bring the sinner to repentance and a return to the ways of God. It must never be for the purpose of embarrassment, or ridicule, or for 'getting back' at someone.

When confronting a sinner, one must do so in a manner that is loving and kind, and not with a condemning spirit. Condemnation must be reserved for those situations where the sin is both flagrant and consistent, and has the potential of bringing harm to other people.

** An Observant Believer Who Definitely Sins On Purpose **

If the sin you have observed has obviously been done on purpose, and you are a witness to it, then it is once again your responsibility to go to that person and confront them with their sin so that they can repent and be forgiven. If they do not repent, you are permitted to speak *lashon hara* about them, but only if doing so will bring further pressure on that person to repent. (The guidelines of Matthew 18 should be followed.)

** A Tzadik **

The *Tzadik* (Tzah-deek = a righteous man) is a person who leads an exemplary life and is always trying their best to follow the instructions of the *Torah* and to help others through their good deeds. In other words, the *Tzadik* tries very hard to lead the kind of life that his Saviour *Yeshua* would lead if He were walking in his shoes.

If a *Tzadik* is observed committing a sin, even if it appears to be a deliberate sin, their past performance should initially lead one to disbelieve what seems to have been observed. According to Jewish teaching, one is required to give such a person the benefit of the doubt and not report his actions to others. Perhaps there was a good reason why the *Tzadik* did what they did, or perhaps the observer did not understand correctly what they thought they saw.

This is a far cry from the attitude so prevalent in modern society where people often look extremely hard in order to find some sin in the life of a person who seems to be making every effort to live righteously. Christians in general are often exposed to this type of scrutiny by those who wish to find fault with them in order to excuse their own sinful lifestyle.

If the sin is flagrant, then we should go to the *Tzadik* privately and, in love, let them know what we have observed. If there was no sin, but merely a misunderstood observation, much grief will be spared. If the *Tzadik* knows that what they did appeared to be evil, even though it was not, they will probably refrain from that kind of 'appearance' in the future, for they already understand that we, as Believers, are called to:

"Abstain from all appearance of evil." (I Thess: 5:22)

However, if the *Tzadik* has actually sinned, this will probably be more than enough for a complete repentant attitude to be forthcoming. If, by chance, this is the beginning of a pattern, the *Tzadik* will soon be classified as 'An Observant Believer Who Possibly Sins On Purpose,' or 'An Observant Believer Who Definitely Sins On Purpose.' In that case, they are to be treated as such. (The guidelines of Matthew 18 must be followed.)

** A Rasha **

The *rasha* (rah-shah) is one who deliberately and regularly violates the Word of God, even though they know what the Scriptures teach. In such cases it is not only permissible to speak *lashon hara* about them, it may actually be required, so that others do not see their open rebellion and think that it is all right to do the same simply because no one is speaking against their evil actions. In such cases it would be a sin if we did not speak out against their actions:

"...whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

(Matt. 18:5-6)

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

(James 4:17)

However, once again it must be reiterated that before we go off halfcocked, speaking *lashon hara* against a *rasha*, the guidelines set down in Matthew 18 must be followed. This always includes going directly to the person about whom we plan to speak against, if it is at all possible.

** A Well-Known Rasha **

The well-known *rasha* is someone who knows the *Torah* instructions but repeatedly sins intentionally. Such a person must be sinning on a regular basis in order to retain this offensive title. While it is considered permissible to speak *lashon hara* about such a person, one must always be careful, for it is possible that even a well-known *rasha* might have repented and begun to live a *Torah* centered lifestyle. One would not want to be in the position of speaking evil about someone that our heavenly Father has now forgiven. We must be absolutely sure that the sins are current and active, and that repentance has not yet taken place.

A principle to always remember when being tempted to speak *lashon hara* is: will these words serve a useful purpose by helping the person to come to repentance, or by warning unsuspecting Believers of the dangers of associating with that person.

Too often, when people speak *lashon hara*, it is for the purpose of hurting the other person. Again, the only two legitimate reasons for speaking *lashon hara* are: to help a person repent, or to warn another individual about the dangers the sinner may represent to them. For this reason Jewish teaching requires that three guidelines be followed before speaking *lashon hara* against a well-known *rasha*.

- ◆ Your purpose must be constructive.
- ◆ You must not exaggerate the sin.
- ◆ You must speak openly and publicly.

** An Apikores **

Someone who does not believe in the existence of God, or who does not accept the teachings of Scripture, is considered to be an *apikores* (ah-pee-koh-rehs). It is considered permissible to speak against such a person if doing so will produce a constructive result. For example, if children or new Believers in your congregation are in danger of being led away from the pure truth of the Scriptures or into immoral behavior by such a person, it is your obligation to speak against that person. Not only must you speak against them, you must do so forcefully, for they represent a clear and present danger to the 'little ones.'

** Someone Who Refuses to Obey the Ruling of the Beit Din **

This category is quite interesting when viewed in light of Matthew 18:17. A *Beit Din* (Bait Deen) is literally a "House of Judgment." In *Yeshua's* day the *Beit Din* was a functioning entity in the synagogue. Not only did each synagogue have its own *Beit Din*, composed of a minimum of three elders, there would also be a larger *Beit Din* that would serve the city or the general area. The *Sanhedrin* (Jewish Supreme Court) consisted of seventy members and was the largest of the *Beit Din*. Regional courts of twenty-three members were the next level down.

Thus the *Beit Din* of a congregation or synagogue was the lowest court in a system that ultimately led to the *Sanhedrin*. The court systems found in the United States and other democracies are often similar in structure. If one does not agree with the ruling of the lower court, the case can be appealed to a higher level court, finally ending in the Supreme Court. The same was true in Jewish law. The Jerusalem Council of the early Church (mentioned in Acts chapter 15) could well have been composed of twenty-three members, serving as the ruling court for the entire Believing Community.

Several New Testament scriptures indicate that the early Church used this very same court structure found in the Jewish Synagogues:

""And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."" (Matt. 18:17)

In this case the 'telling it to the church' would be to bring the matter before the *Beit Din* for a decision. Both parties were expected to abide by their decision:

""Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."" (Matt. 18:18)

The binding mentioned here refers specifically to the decisions rendered by the *Beit Din*. It does not mean that the Believers could make new laws that would be in disagreement with the law of God given in the *Torah*. Rather, they were to make binding decisions based on the teachings of the *Torah*.

According to Jewish teaching, a person who did not abide by the ruling of the *Beit Din*, and could not offer a valid reason for disobeying their ruling, was considered to have forgone his protection from *lashon hara*, and it was permissible to publicize this fact. This does not mean it was permissible to speak other, unrelated *lashon hara* about this person. Only the facts pertinent to the case that came before the *Beit Din* were open for discussion.

* Another Caution *

It is common among some Christian groups to disparage other professing Believers (in *Yeshua HaMashiach*) who hold different interpretations on certain doctrines or issues. It must be remembered that many people who profess their belief that Jesus (*Yeshua*) is the promised Messiah, may have never studied the Scriptures in an in-depth way. Much of what they believe may come from the teachings of the Church in which they find themselves (and into which they may well have been born), and not from the Scriptures themselves.

In determining who in fact falls into the classification of a *rasha*, it is important to remember that many people cannot be considered to be in open rebellion against *HaShem*, because they are operating from a position of ignorance. Rather than condemning these people, it would be far better if we could bring ourselves into a position where we could teach them the pure word of Scripture:

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:19)

~ Rechilus ~

Our discussion up to this point has been centered on *lashon hara*. Now we need to address those situations where *rechilus* is permissible, or mandatory, as well. Once again, let us define our terms. *Rechilus* refers to a 'talebearer.' It comes from the Hebrew word *rochel* (roh-chel) which means 'a traveling merchant.' In other words, one who spreads *rechilus* is a person who goes about carrying tales. Usually it involves telling a person what someone else has said about them. It is written:

"You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people;..." (Lev. 19:16a)

**"These six things the LORD hates,
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:
A proud look,
A lying tongue,
Hands that shed innocent blood,
A heart that devises wicked plans,
A false witness who speaks lies,
And one who sows discord among brethren."** (Prov. 6:16-19)

Often times *rechilus* is used to separate brethren from each other. Someone makes a thoughtless remark (*lashon hara*) about another person to a friend. The 'friend' then goes to the person about who the remark was made and relates it to them. The person hearing the *rechilus* can be devastated, and often a broken or severely maimed relationship is the result.

However, there are cases where it is permissible to speak *rechilus*. This occurs when withholding such information could bring harm to the one who needs to know about it. For example, if a person knows that someone is going to form some type of a partnership (whether business, marriage, or concerning church affairs), and they have information that leads them to believe that one of the participants may be harmed in some way because of this relationship, then they are obligated to bring that information to the person, even though they have not been specifically asked for it. However, once the partnership has been formally made, such information should not be disclosed, for it is now too late.

An example would be if a man and woman are going to be married. Let us say that a third person is aware that one of them is hiding something very important from the other. In such a case it is that person's obligation to go to the innocent party and relate what they know. At that point it is up to the innocent party to decide if they want to go through with the marriage or call it off. For the third party not to tell what they know is likened in Jewish thought to the following prohibition found in the *Torah*:

"You shall not ... put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:14)

Someone who is not aware of certain facts is considered 'blind' to that information.

However, if the third party related the story because they wanted to marry one of the principals, it would be wrong for them to tell what they knew, for now they have something to gain personally.

Sometimes it is necessary for a person who is going into a partnership to actually seek out a third party and request information about their potential partner. It does not matter whether that partnership is in the realm of a future business partner, marriage partner, employer, employee, or in church affairs, the principle is always the same.

One word of caution. When it becomes necessary to go to someone in order to find out about the background of another person, one should always tell them why this information is needed. If the reason does not hold sufficient merit, the person being questioned is permitted to decline the request for information.

Most Jewish teachings include a checklist of rules to help a person determine when it is permissible to take action. *Rechilus* is no exception. Listed below are six conditions that are recommended to be met before a person reveals *rechilus* to another:

- ◆ Be sure there is a real danger present. Do not let your imagination run loose.
- ◆ If there is an alternate method (other than *rechilus*) that might be used to warn the person, try that first.
- ◆ Never exaggerate. To make things seem worse than they really are is wrong.
- ◆ Make sure your motives are pure. If you have anything to gain from the breakup of a proposed partnership, you should not tell what you know.
- ◆ Do everything in your power to insure that the results will be positive.
- ◆ Do everything in your power to make sure no one is unduly harmed.

~ When You Absolutely Must Speak Lashon Hara or Rechilus ~

As we have seen, there are times when it is absolutely necessary to speak *lashon hara* or *rechilus*. However, these occasions are probably few in number. Therefore, it behooves us to always review in our minds what things must have taken place in order for us to take this drastic form of action.

Instead of asking; "When may I speak *lashon hara* or *rechilus*?" we should be asking ourselves; "When must I speak *lashon hara* or *rechilus*?" Hopefully, the guidelines given in this article will be of assistance in making such a serious decision. They are restated here in slightly modified form. In order to speak *lashon hara* or *rechilus*:

- ◆ We must have seen the sin ourselves, or have other firsthand knowledge of it.
- ◆ We must be sure that what we saw is a sin. We must not jump to conclusions, but must be absolutely positive that the person in question did the dirty deed.
- ◆ There must be absolutely no exaggeration.
- ◆ We must speak to the sinner before spreading the story. If they do repent and/or make restitution (whatever is required) we must not speak *lashon hara* about them.
- ◆ We must be willing to tell it to the person's face, even if unable to do so.
- ◆ Our motivation for telling the story must be pure. (Ridicule, revenge or personal gain are not pure motives.)
- ◆ We must not cause the person to suffer in excess of what they actually deserve.
- ◆ *Lashon hara* must be stated publicly and not as a 'whisper' campaign behind the person's back.
- ◆ *Rechilus* must only be related to the person who needs to know.

It is our recommendation that these principles be thoroughly discussed and become understood by all who read them, for by having many members of the Bride study and practice them, a great healing can begin to take place. The result of this healing will be a more beautiful Bride.

"And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (Rev. 19:8)

"...that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:27)

May we all continue to grow in grace and knowledge, benefiting from what we have learned.

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Chapter Five

Scriptural Examples Of Lashon Hara

There are a great many examples of *lashon hara* in the scriptures. The following is a sampling, given to help you, the reader, to more fully understand what constitutes *lashon hara* and some possible consequences for speaking or accepting it.

The very first case of *lashon hara* is found recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis, when the serpent confronted Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the course of their conversation the serpent casually asked Eve:

"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

(Gen. 3:1b)

This statement by itself does not necessarily constitute *lashon hara*, but because of what the serpent is trying to accomplish, it probably does already fall into that category. Perhaps it was accompanied by a sarcastic tone of voice, or the all-knowing raising of the eyebrows. Intent is often a key element when one is called upon to discern whether something that has been spoken is actually *lashon hara* or not.

Eve answered the serpent innocently and truthfully:

"And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor touch it, least you die.''" (Gen. 3:2-3)

Some have thought that Eve was the one who embellished *HaShem's* original command, which did not include the part about not 'touching' the fruit. However, Jewish tradition teaches that Adam was in fact the one who added that part to the command. If so, it is the very first example of a 'fence around the law.'

Now comes the first verifiable case of *lashon hara*. The serpent tells an absolute lie about the Creator God, casting doubt in Eve's mind about His veracity and causing her to have a lowered opinion of Him:

"And the serpent said to the woman, 'You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Gen. 3:4-5)

The result of this first act of *lashon hara* was the entrance of death into the world.

However, two more examples of *lashon hara* follow right on the heels of the first. When Adam was confronted by God about eating the fruit, he did not accept the blame (and shame) for doing it, but rather tried to place the blame upon his wife, Eve by also speaking *lashon hara*:

"Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'" (Gen. 3:12)

Even though this was a true statement, according to the principles of *lashon hara* Adam should have accepted full responsibility and not blamed Eve for his own personal sin.

Likewise, the woman, when questioned, spoke *lashon hara* by placing the blame on the serpent:

"And the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" (Gen. 3:13)

The words of the serpent were the initiating cause for the action taken by Eve, and subsequently by Adam, and that action led to the necessity for all of us (their descendants) to die the first death. If it were not for the beautiful plan of redemption, fulfilled for us by our Husband, *Yeshua HaMashiach*, we would all come to death with absolutely no hope, and all because of *lashon hara*, for without that first act, there would have been no temptation and therefore no death.

For his act of *lashon hara*, the serpent is said to have incurred the punishment of leprosy. The circles on the snakes body are, according to Jewish thought, signs of the leprosy that he carries. According to tradition, the serpent

will never be healed of his leprosy, even during the Messianic kingdom. Also, he is cut off from society and must live 'outside the camp' as an unclean thing.

~ Even Great Men Sometimes Speak Lashon Hara ~

To emphasize the fact that it is extremely easy to let *lashon hara* pass through one's lips, *HaShem* (YHVH) allowed some of the leading Biblical figures to have their *lashon hara* recorded so that we might learn from their errors.

"This is the genealogy of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father." (Gen. 37:2)

Joseph (*Yoseif* = Yoh-safe') is considered to have been guilty of speaking *lashon hara* about four of his brothers. Even though it is quite probable they were doing some things that they should not have been doing, unless their acts were such that in some way would jeopardize other people or the family as a whole, *Yoseif* should have kept quite about it. In other words, the principles established to help us guard against speaking *lashon hara* forbid our telling of stories about other people unless real injury might result if the information is withheld.

As a result of his speaking *lashon hara* about his brothers, *Yoseif* was 'cut off' from his people. Needless to say, the later act of his brothers in taking him prisoner, and the plan of some of them to actually murder him, were not acts of men who were operating in the realm of righteousness. However, it is highly unlikely that it would have gone to this extreme if *Yoseif* had not brought evil reports about them to their father.

Of course, we learn later that *HaShem* permitted all of this to happen so that a way could be prepared for the children of Israel to be saved from the future famine, and be given a comfortable place to live in Egypt while *Ya'acov* (Yah-ah-cove = Jacob) and his twelve sons were still alive. Often times *HaShem* uses mistakes in our lives to teach us valuable lessons.

While *Yoseif* was not stricken with leprosy for his *lashon hara*, he was given the punishment of a leper. He was cut off from his family and had to live outside the camp of Israel for many years (including prison time), before finally being reunited with them.

Moshe (Moh-shay = Moses) too had a problem with *lashon hara*. It occurred when he was confronted by *HaShem* (YHVH) at the 'burning bush':

"Then Moses answered and said, 'But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, "The LORD has not appeared to you."'" (Ex. 4:1)

This statement by *Moshe* is considered to be *lashon hara* against both *HaShem* and the children Israel. It is *lashon hara* against *HaShem* because *Moshe* is suggesting that He is unable to turn the hearts of the people so that they will listen to *Moshe*. It is *lashon hara* against the children of Israel because *Moshe* is implying that they will not listen to him, even though he is being sent by *HaShem*.

The result of this encounter is that *HaShem* caused *Moshe's* hand to become leprous. True it did not last, for when *Moshe* put his hand back inside of his clothes and withdrew it again, the leprosy disappeared. Nevertheless, the symbolism of leprosy was there, and it was directly connected to the speaking of *lashon hara*. Likewise, when any Israelite spoke *lashon hara*, by questioning *Moshe's* divine commission, *Moshe* was to show them the leprous hand so they would both hear and fear what *HaShem* was doing through him, and understand that they needed to support *Moshe* lest they too should become leprous.

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Chapter Six

A Man After God's Own Heart

Of all the people mentioned in the Scriptures, King David (pronounced Dah-veed' in Hebrew) seems to stand out as the man selected to give us both very good and very bad examples. It should come as no surprise that David also had at least one problem concerning *lashon hara*. On the other hand, David also set us a good example when he refused to act against an individual that was speaking *lashon hara* against him personally.

The first story revolves around the lame grandson of King Saul, Mephibosheth, whom David had befriended after Saul and Jonathan (Mephibosheth's father) had been slain and David had become King. David restored all of King Saul's land and belongings to Mephibosheth and invited him to dine at the King's table on a regular basis. Mephibosheth had a servant named Ziba whom David appointed as overseer of all Mephibosheth's belongings. However there was one problem, Ziba was greedy and wanted the land and possessions for himself.

Ziba found his opportunity when King David was forced to flee Jerusalem during the rebellion of his son Absalom. As David was making his escape he ran into Ziba on the east side of the Mount of Olives:

"When David was a little past the top of the mountain, there was Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, who met him with a couple of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred summer fruits, and a skin of wine.

"And the king said, 'What do you mean to do with these?' So Ziba said, 'The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who are faint in the wilderness to drink.'

"Then the king said, 'And where is your master's son?' (meaning Mephibosheth). And Ziba said to the king, 'Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, "Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me."

"So the king said to Ziba, 'Here, all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours.' And Ziba said, 'I humbly bow before you, that I may find favor in your sight, my lord, O king!'"

(II Sam. 16:1-4)

Here David made the mistake of listening to and believing *lashon hara*. The truth of the matter was that Mephibosheth had wanted to join David but had stayed in Jerusalem because he was deceived by his 'trusted' servant Ziba.

But the story does not end here. After the rebellion was over and David returned to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth came out to meet him:

"Now Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. And he had not cared for his feet, nor trimmed his mustache, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in peace. So it was, when he had come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said to him, 'Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?'

"And he answered, 'My lord, O king, my servant deceived me. For your servant said, "I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go to the king," because your servant is lame. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king, but my lord the king is like the angel of God. Therefore do what is good in your eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king. Yet you set your servant among those who eat at your own table. Therefore what right have I still to cry out anymore to the king?'

"So the king said to him, 'Why do you speak anymore of your matters? I have said, "You and Ziba divide the land."'

"Then Mephibosheth said to the king, 'Rather, let him take it all, inasmuch as my lord the king has come back in peace to his own house.'" (II Sam. 19:24-30)

One can feel the great disappointment in Mephibosheth's voice as he realizes that King David had actually believed the evil report (*lashon hara*) that Ziba had brought concerning him. According to Jewish tradition, it was at this very point (when David divided Mephibosheth's possessions with Ziba) that *HaShem* first decided to divide the kingdom of Israel. Volume III of *The Midrash Says*, by Rabbi Moshe Weissman, states on page 154:

"When David pronounced the words 'You and Tziva (*Ziba*) shall divide the estate,' a Heavenly Voice proclaimed, 'Your kingdom shall be divided...'"

~ David Refuses to Retaliate ~

In the second example concerning David and *lashon hara* we find David being vilified by one of his subjects, and yet he refuses to allow a hand to be raised against him. Interestingly enough, this event takes place on the very same journey as the one just mentioned. David is fleeing Jerusalem because of the rebellion of his son Absalom. In fact, it takes place immediately following David's encounter with Ziba, when he first listened to the *lashon hara* against Mephibosheth:

"Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

"Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: 'Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!'

"Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!'

"And the king said, 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him "Curse David." Who then shall say, "Why have you done so?"'

"And David said to Abishai and all his servants, 'See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day.'

"And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust."

(II Sam. 16:5-13)

Despite having just listened to and acted upon Ziba's *lashon hara*, David now musters the strength of character which only comes through closeness to *HaShem* (*YHVH*). It enabled him to resist the temptation to have Shimei killed, even though David had every right to order it done.

As we all know, it is extremely difficult to resist lashing back at someone who is speaking *lashon hara* against us personally. Usually we feel the need to defend ourselves against such attacks. Yet all of us need to resist this impulse. *Yeshua* also set this same example for us when He refused to defend Himself before His accusers:

**""He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And like a lamb silent before its shearer,
So He opened not His mouth.
In His humiliation His justice was taken away.
And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth."" Acts 8:32-33)**

They accused *Yeshua* of blasphemy but He, knowing it was not true, did not try to defend Himself and let the evil accusation stand. He did this so that He might bring glory to His Father in heaven through His crucifixion and resurrection, and the resultant forgiveness of sins.

The result of David's humility and self control is found in the book of Esther:

"Now in Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

"And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter." (Esther 2:5-7)

This particular Shimei apparently was a brother to King Saul, whom David had replaced as king of Israel. No wonder Shimei heaped such derogatory filth upon David's head. Yet by letting Shimei go free, David allowed a genealogy to continue that led to the birth of Mordecai who, along with his cousin Esther, are looked upon as being saviors of the Jewish people, when they were dwelling under the rule of the king of Persia, Ahasuerus. Scripture is silent, but it is quite possible that Esther too is descended from Shimei.

Truly, the ways of *HaShem* are awesome. We cannot know, when we speak *lashon hara*, the impact for evil that it might have on the spiritual well being of another Believer. Our thoughtless words might be the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back," and be the very thing that causes a member of the Bride to tear themselves away from the Body. Likewise, our refusal to accept or speak *lashon hara* may also be used by *HaShem* (*YHVH*) to produce much good further down the line. If we stay close to *HaShem* and are always desirous of doing His will, He will guide us into the proper manner in which we should respond to others. By keeping ourselves in line with *HaShem's* ways we can allow ourselves to be used for wondrous things:

"O LORD, You have searched me and known me.

You know my sitting down and my rising up;

You understand my thought afar off.

You comprehend my path and my lying down,

And are acquainted with all my ways.

For there is not a word on my tongue,

But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

You have hedged me behind and before,

And laid Your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

It is high, I cannot attain it." (Psalm 139:1-6)

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Chapter Seven

Selected Scriptures Relating to Lashon Hara and Rechilus

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Ex. 20:16)

This is the granddaddy of all the scriptures concerning *lashon hara*. All of the following hang upon this great principle of not dealing falsely with your neighbor.

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"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; ..." (Ex. 23:1-2a)

"Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly. ..." (Deut. 27:24a)

**"Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor,
Him I will destroy;
The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart,
Him I will not endure." (Psalm 101:5)**

Few things are more evil than putting your brother to shame by speaking evil of him. It is said that slander kills three: the person slandered, the slanderer, and the person who passes on the slander.

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"Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you diligently observe and do according to all that the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do." (Deut. 24:8)

The thing that the priests and Levites were commanded to teach the people was to follow all the *mitzvot* of the *Torah*. If a person at that time followed the *mitzvot* (commandments) of the priests, they would have avoided leprosy altogether.

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"You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shall fear your God; I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:14)

It was considered putting a stumbling block before the blind to speak *lashon hara* about a person. Because the person being spoken about would not know they were being maligned, they are like a deaf or blind man to that fact, since they neither see it nor hear it. Later on, when a person does hear it from a talebearer, it could well become a stumbling block to their spiritual development.

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"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him." (Lev. 19:17)

If you truly have something to say to a person, or about a person, you should say it directly to them in private. To do so is an act of love. Conversely, to speak about the problem to someone else is an act of hatred, for it may cause the hearer of your *lashon hara* to have a diminished opinion of that person.

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"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:18)

If you recall that someone refused to grant you a favor, you are considered to be bearing a grudge. However, refusing to grant a favor in return is considered to be vengeance.

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"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established."

(Deut. 19:15)

If a person truly has committed a sin, then it must be personally known by at least two or three people before any legal action can be taken, otherwise the punishment must be left to God:

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"Keep yourself far from a false matter; ..." (Ex. 23:7a)

Most *lashon hara* has enough untruth or half-truths to be classified as a 'false matter,' therefore, it is best to stay far from it.

~ Blessings for Tongue Control ~

On the positive side, if one can learn the difficult task of controlling their tongue, many blessings will come their way.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." (Ex. 20:12)

It all begins right here. If you cannot honor your parents, you will be unable to honor *HaShem* (*YHVH*) who is your primary parent. Also, if you cannot honor both *HaShem* and your parents, you will be unable to honor your friends and your neighbors, much less your enemies.

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"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:32)

Rather than ridiculing the old person, we are commanded to honor them.

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"Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

(Deut. 10:19)

If you truly love someone, you will not speak *lashon hara* against them, or *rechilus* to them. This includes people of different nationalities, races and creeds as well.

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"And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you." (Lev. 25:35)

The principle here is to help this person, not talk about his problems.

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"The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments (*mitzvot* or good deeds) of the LORD your God and walk in His ways." (Deut. 28:9)

One of the major good deeds that all of us can begin doing immediately is to stop speaking *lashon hara* or peddling *rechilus*. Once we have learned how to avoid speaking *lashon hara*, there is one more thing that we must do:

"...teach them [*the mitzvot*] diligently to your children..." (Deut. 6:7)

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Chapter Eight

Repentance

For Lashon Hara and Rechilus

Like any other sin, that of *lashon hara* can only be forgiven if the perpetrator is willing to come to complete repentance. In Hebrew, the word that is often used for repentance is *teshuvah* (teh-shoe-vah'). It literally means 'to return.' When we fully repent, we return with all of our heart and mind to our Creator God. The same is true when repenting for having participated in *lashon hara* or *rechilus*.

Whenever a person participates in *lashon hara* or *rechilus*, the sin is against both *HaShem* (*YHVH*) and against the person who was the object of the evil talk. The participant sins against *HaShem* by breaking the various commandments (*mitzvot*) that prohibit such behavior. The participant sins against the individual, about whom the *lashon hara* was spoken, because the speaker has caused their good name to be besmirched. Repentance before *HaShem* includes the following steps:

- ◆ Regret for having committed the sin.
- ◆ Confession to *HaShem* that the sin has actually been committed.
- ◆ Accepting *HaShem's* forgiveness through the blood of *Yeshua HaMashiach*.
- ◆ Determination to live a righteous, holy life, as *HaShem* has called us to do.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

Repentance before the individual is more complicated. If you know the person whom you spoke against is aware that you did so, you need to ask them for forgiveness as well. However, they too have an obligation, for they, having heard the *lashon hara*, need to confront it:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother." (Matt. 18:15)

So there is an obligation on the part of both individuals. However, do not go to your brother until you have spent much time in prayer, seeking wisdom:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5)

~ The Purpose For Our Tongues ~

The tongue is a most powerful object. It can be used as a tool to do good, or a weapon to do evil:

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat of its fruit." (Prov. 18:21)

The tongue holds the power of life and death. In many cases, people have actually died because of what others have said about them. That is why it is so important to learn to control the tongue even in the smallest of matters. If a person can control their tongue in every small thing that comes along, it will be far easier to control during a major test.

If we have really come to love another person as ourself, we will not harm that person verbally by spreading evil reports about them. Above all, we must learn to never speak *lashon hara* about another member of the Bride. When one member hurts we all hurt, and if we speak against the Bride, we are in reality speaking against ourselves.

What then is the purpose of the tongue other than to provide the communication necessary to function within our families and society? It truly has a very great purpose, and that is to praise God:

"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." (Heb. 13:15)

Whenever we get the urge to speak *lashon hara* about another person, or when someone in our presence begins to speak *lashon hara*, we need to refocus our thoughts on:

"...whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever, things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things."

(Phil. 4:8)

The result of this practice will be that you will come to find favor with both your Father in heaven and your brother on earth.

~ Summary ~

LASHON HARA IS ANY SPOKEN OR WRITTEN WORD, OR AN EXPRESSION OF THE BODY, THAT CAUSES ANOTHER PERSON TO BE HURT IN ANY WAY.

The antidote for *lashon hara* is to keep our tongues, pens, and computers so busy focusing on good things (with praise for *HaShem* and thanks for our Husband and Saviour, *Yeshua HaMashiach*), that we do not have the time and/or desire to hurt others.

It is a sad commentary on the state of the Bride of Messiah to realize that much *lashon hara* is being spoken by people who claim to be Believers. All of us have been guilty of this sin, and all of us need to repent for past *lashon hara*. Equally important, is that each of us make a solid commitment to refrain from speaking evil of others. When that goal is reached we will indeed be blessed more abundantly, for it is written:

**"He who follows righteousness and mercy
Finds life, righteousness and honor." (Prov. 21:21)**

"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth." (I Cor. 5:7-8)

And may we all pray as did King David:

**"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;
Keep watch over the door of my lips." (Psalm 141:3)**

**"O Lord, open my lips,
And let my mouth declare Your praise." (Psalm 51:15 TNK)**

**"May the words of my mouth and the prayer of my heart
be acceptable to You,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:15)**

Shalom!

DEW & SAW

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