

Guide for using this handout:

Notes for parents appear in gray boxes like this one. These notes are intended to help guide the conversation with your children.

Halachot and Torah sources appear in boxes like this one, written in plain English. Read these out loud and explain when necessary.

Points for discussion are written in this format, with no border or box.

When you reach a line like this,
stop and wait for the next section to be introduced.

REVIEW FROM LAST TIME...

Let's start with a review of the halachot we've already discussed.

There are two basic categories of lashon hara:

- 1) Damaging statements: saying something that could cause a person distress, fear, physical harm, or financial loss (even if it is not derogatory.)
- 2) Derogatory statements: saying something negative about a fellow Jew (even if one knows that no harm or defamation will result.)

NOTE: Most statements that are considered lashon hara are both damaging and derogatory.

A statement that can cause damage to a person is considered lashon hara even if it is not the least bit derogatory.

A statement that is derogatory is considered lashon hara, even if it is not damaging.

After we learned those halachot at the first Virtual V'Shinantam, we got a little more specific at the next one...

One may not say that a person is not wise or intelligent.

- “Mrs. Feldman had to repeat herself ten times until George finally understood what was going on.”
- “Don’t even bother trying to explain that to Jordana. She’ll never understand it.”
- “I didn’t do so well on my math test, but at least I did better than Mike. He got the lowest grade in the class!”

It is forbidden to say that someone is physically weak or that there may be something wrong with their health if there is any possibility that this may cause them harm.

- “Don’t pick Stu for our team! He can’t even kick the ball halfway across the field!”
- “Ever since our teacher recovered from covid, he hasn’t had much energy during class.”

One may not say that a person is not skilled in his work.

- “The magician who performed at my birthday party wasn’t very good. I knew how he did all of his tricks!”
- “Joe painted his own house. It looks terrible.”

One may not belittle other people’s possessions.

- “Did you see her shoes? I would never wear shoes that look like that!”
- “Mrs. Schotzenfeffel drove us home from school today. Her car smelled funny.”

One may not speak negatively about the merchandise that a person sells. (Doing so can be particularly painful to the subject and can cause him to lose business.)

- “That ice cream store doesn’t have any of the flavors I like.”
- “I didn’t like that camp. They really need to fix the place up.”

Pause here.

Are there times when it's okay to speak Lashon Hara about another person?

Let's play a little game. I'll give you a few situations, and you vote whether you think it's permitted or not.

Avi will do this part with the kids over Zoom. Parents, you can take a break for a few minutes.

Pause here.

HALACHA:

Toelet (pronounced toe-ELL-et) is something negative that is said about a person for a constructive purpose, such as:

- To help the person you're speaking about
- To protect others from the person you're speaking about
- To make peace between people
- To help others to learn from the mistakes of the person you're speaking about.

Discuss:

- Can you think of a situation in which saying something bad about a person would help them?
- Can you think of a situation in which saying something bad about a person would protect other people?
- Can you think of a situation in which saying something bad about a person would make peace between people?
- Can you think of a situation in which saying something bad about a person would help others learn from that person's mistakes?

Pause here.

The halachot you are about to learn are very complicated. Even for adults who have learned all of these halachot very well, it's important to ask a rabbi before speaking about someone, just to make sure that we're really speaking *l'toelet*, and not just spreading lashon hara.

HALACHA:

There are seven very important things you must know before speaking *l'toelet* about a person. Let's look at the first three:

1. The information must be 100% true. We must be completely certain that the information is true. This is only possible when the information is first-hand, meaning you did not hear it from someone else.

Discuss: Why do you think it's a problem to say something you heard from someone else?

2. The situation must be clearly understood. Even when we think we understand what happened, we may be mistaken. Sometimes we only know part of what happened; other times we may not realize that when the person did what we thought was wrong, they had a really good reason for doing what they did.

Discuss: Can you think of a situation when you saw something bad happen, but later found out that what you saw wasn't as bad as you thought it was?

3. The person is spoken to first. One must first attempt to discuss the issue with the person who has acted wrongly.

Discuss: Can you think of a situation in which speaking to a person who did something wrong would fix the problem so that you don't need to say something about them?

Pause here.

Next V'Shinantam, we'll finish discussing speaking *l'toelet*. But let's just take a quick look at all of the main rules about speaking *l'toelet* (including the ones we did not get into tonight), and we'll cover the last four and a few other rules next time.

HALACHA:

In summary, it is permissible to speak negatively about a person in order to:

- A. Help the person,
- B. Protect others from the person,
- C. Resolve major arguments, or
- D. Enable others to learn from the mistakes of that person,

Provided that:

1. The information is accurate,
2. The situation is understood clearly,
3. The person is spoken to first,
4. All other solutions are tried first,
5. No exaggeration is used,
6. The intent is pure, and
7. No undue harm will be caused by the statement.

Stop here
