

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT Grade 7- LASHON HARA/ Jane Dubro

Read following information, and write a summary of what you have learned.

Just Kidding: The Power of Words

Once upon a time, there was a woman who loved to talk about her neighbors. The neighbors were so angry that they went to the rabbi to complain. The rabbi called the woman and asked her to come visit him. When the rabbi asked the woman why she made up stories about her neighbors, she simply laughed and told him that she just makes the stories a little bigger. "After all," she continued, "What's talk but a few words which I can always take back?" The rabbi immediately gave the woman a pillow and asked her to cut it open. The rabbi then asked the woman to shake the pillow outside the window. Feathers flew everywhere. After all the feathers were gone from the pillow, the rabbis asked the woman to gather each and every feather and bring them back. The woman gasped. "That's impossible," she cried. "Ah!," the rabbi continued, "So it is impossible for you to take back all the unkind things you have said about others."

Oops ... I didn't mean that

Every word that comes out of our mouth has the potential to hurt or destroy. Once I was waiting on line at a store when I noticed a young woman complaining loudly to a supervisor about the slow service of a particular clerk. In screaming for service, the woman had no intention of getting the clerk fired - she was simply frustrated and needed to vent. It was too late. The clerk lost his job and financial security. Perhaps the woman wanted to take her comments back, but she couldn't. Once you speak about someone to someone else, the damage has been done. Words - simple words - have the power to destroy businesses, reputations, and friendships.

Gossip is as Bad as Murder?

One thing we are all guilty of is gossip. According to our sages, both listening to and spreading gossip is one of

the worst offenses we can commit. In fact, some say that the sin of gossip is as severe as idolatry, adultery, and murder, the three worst sins in the judgement of the rabbis. Gossip, like murder, kills. The Talmud asks, "Why is gossip like a three-pronged tongue? Because it kills three people: The person who says it, the person who listens to it, and the person about whom it is said."

Lashon HaRa - Guarding Your Tongue

The Hebrew word for gossip is lashon hara - literally meaning an evil tongue. Lashon HaRa generally refers to a derogatory statement about someone else. However, spreading gossip, rumors and slander are all considered abhorrent according to Jewish tradition. We are supposed to guard our tongues from speaking evil. "If a person says that a rabbi cannot sing and a cantor is not a scholar, he is guilty of speaking lashon hara. But if someone says that a rabbi is not a scholar and a cantor cannot sing, it is equal to murder."

Gossip in the Bible

The Hebrew Scriptures is full of malicious and unintentional lashon hara. SARAH - Our Matriarch Sarah speaks about Abraham's old age and laughs at the idea that her husband will father a child. (Genesis 18)

JOSEPH - Joseph brings false and evil reports about his brothers to his father Jacob. (Genesis 3)

MIRIAM - Miriam speaks against Moses for marrying a Cushite woman. (Numbers 12)

We learn from each case that speaking falsely and pre-judging is not the way to live. The Bible's prohibition against gossip is so severe that the text warns us on several occasions not to engage in lashon hara.

"You must not carry false rumors" (Exodus 223:1)

"You shall not go about as a tale bearer among your people" (Leviticus 19:16)

The Book of Ecclesiastes (28:18) points further to the notion that speaking improperly is more harmful than anything else. "Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not as many as have fallen by the tongue."

The Sages' Interpretation of Gossip It is not surprising

that the many generations of rabbis in our history have severely condemned gossip. A passage in the Talmud (Gittin 65a) explains that the destruction of the city of Jerusalem resulted from charges brought to the Romans by an angry man who claims to have insulted by one of his neighbors. Furthermore, a midrash (Beresheit Rabbah 98:23) reflects, "What is spoken in Rome may kill in Syria." In other words, rumors spread at a rapid rate. Even Miriam is chastised for sharing gossip with her brother Aaron, even though he is only one person.

Gossip and Slander Today

A modern-day rabbi, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kahan (the Chafetz Caim) has written extensively on the laws of lashon hara. His compilation "Guard Your Tongue" is a collection of the thirty-one Torah commandments dealing with lashon hara. Some of his profound insights include:

One may not make comments that cause pain, financial loss, or damage.

One may not make derogatory comments, even if they are true.

One may not defame the character of another.

One may not say that another did wrong, has faulty traits, or lacks virtue.

One may not say "so and so is my good friend or relative so I can say what I want."

One must know if information is true before telling others.

One may not exaggerate.

One may not gossip and then say "just kidding."

Why Do People Gossip, and How to Avoid it

1) They are angry. When people with bad tempers get excited, they often speak without thinking and say anything that comes to mind regardless of the consequences. If you get overly excited, try calming yourself down before you hurt someone else.

2) They are Jokers. People who tell jokes may tend to join groups that make fun of other people. There is nothing wrong with joke telling, but stay away from people who constantly make fun of

others.

3) They are arrogant. There are those people who feel they are better than others. If this is you, take a minute to write down some of your own faults and imperfections. Once you know yourself, you will be less likely to speak out against others.

4) They give up. Many people don't bother avoiding lashon hara because it is so difficult. As Herzl once said, "If you will it, it is no dream." It might be difficult at first, but once it becomes a habit, it will not require a great effort.

5) They are complainers. Some people complain about others. Perhaps they feel that others dislike them. We are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. Train yourself to look at others in a favorable light.

6) They have bad friends. If you have friends who gossip, you may want to think about getting new ones. If your friends are doing it, there is a greater chance that you will partake.

If you are serious about stopping gossip, then study the laws of lashon hara. One who studies the laws over and over will be less likely to engage in these negative traits. Some students of Torah make it a point to study two laws of lashon hara a day. The best place to start is by reading the laws of the Chafetz Chaim. Check for copies in your local Jewish bookstore or library.

What to Talk About Instead of Gossip

Take advantage of the laws of lashon hara and improve the quality of your conversations with your friends and family. What is there to talk about? Talk about anything except other people. According to the commentary Divrai Naftoli, superior people speak about ideas, mediocre people speak about things, and inferior people speak about others. When we devote our conversations to egotistical interests, we end up speaking lashon hara.

You Can Never Take That Back

Why is the tongue like an arrow? If a person draws a

sword to kill a neighbor, and the neighbor begs for mercy, the person's mind can change, and the sword can be returned unused. However, once an arrow is loosed, it can never be called back, even if the person who shot it has a change of mind. (Midrash Soher Tov).

7th grade homework assignment/ Jane Dubro

Complete questions and read following information

Tzedakah Q&A

What does the term tzedakah mean?

How are the poor regarded in Jewish tradition?

Who is required to give tzedakah?

What categories of people get top priority in receiving tzedakah?

Should charity also be given to the non-Jewish poor?

Should tzedakah be given to someone we suspect of deception?

How much should one contribute to charity?

Q: What does the term tzedakah mean?

It is derived from the Hebrew tzedek, meaning "justice" or what is right. In the Torah it is also used to mean righteousness - in the sense of piety. One cannot be considered pious - a tzadik - unless one lives a righteousness and just life, and that requires devotion to helping the needy. Although the idea of charity appears throughout the Bible, there is no special term for it. Only later, in the Talmud and thereafter, did tzedakah generally come to mean charity.

Q: How are the poor regarded in Jewish tradition?

The underprivileged are not to be blamed for their condition. The Hebrew prophets held that social injustice is the cause of poverty. Ezekiel attributed the destruction of Sodom to its lack of charity. By Jewish law the poor have the right to receive tzedakah. And, according to the Talmud, those who receive it because the donors are given the opportunity to perform a mitzvah. This attitude is based on the belief that all earthly possessions belong to God and that one's worth is measured in mitzvot, not in material goods.

Q: Who is required to give tzedakah?

It is required of everyone, including poor people who themselves receive charity. The poor people who themselves receive charity. The poor shall not be denied the feelings of joy and self-esteem that derive from performing the mitzvah of tzedakah. As the Talmud teaches: "When a person gives even a perutah (the smallest coin) he or she is privileged to sense God's presence."

Q: What categories of people get top priority in receiving tzedakah?

The Bible emphasizes the mitzvah of caring for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. In the process of refining the laws pertaining to charity, the rabbis of the Talmud determined that preference was to be given to women over men and one's poor relatives over strangers. The poor of Eretz Yisrael took precedence over everybody.

Q: Should charity also be given to the non-Jewish poor?

Yes, it should be given to all peoples, because in doing

so we foster peace in the world.

Q: Should tzedakah be given to someone we suspect of deception?

It is better to give to a deceiver than to risk depriving the deserving of relief.

Q: Is it preferable to give tzedakah openly or anonymously?

Every effort must be made to avoid causing shame or humiliation to the recipient of tzedakah. As it is written in the Talmud, when R. Yannai observed somebody giving money to a poor man in public, he said: "Better not to have given him anything than to have given and caused humiliation." The most famous formulation of laws concerning the relationship of donor to recipient is Maimonides' Eight Degrees of Charity.

From the lowest to the highest level they are to give

- 1. but sadly,**
- 2. less than is fitting, but in good humor,**
- 3. only after having been asked,**
- 4. before being asked,**
- 5. so that the donor doesn't know who the recipient is,**
- 6. so that the recipient doesn't know who the donor is,**
- 7. so that neither knows the identity of the other, and**
- 8. in a manner so that the recipient becomes self-sufficient, thus avoiding the loss of self-respect that may result from receiving the lower degrees of charity.**

Q: How much should one contribute to charity?
One is expected to give up to one-fifth of one's possessions to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah to its fullest degree. Less than one-tenth is considered miserly. The law cautions against giving beyond one's means, for it is no benefit to society if a person becomes impoverished by giving excessively.

