

DA64. Not Speaking Badly or Critically of Our Brother or Neighbor.

We are not to speak badly or critically of our brother or neighbor.

DA64a: *We are not to speak badly or critically of our brother.*

DA64b: *We are not to speak badly or critically of our neighbor..*

This precept is derived from His Word (blessed is He):

Key New Testament Scriptures

James 4:11

Brothers, stop speaking against each other! Whoever speaks against a brother or judges a brother is speaking against Torah and judging Torah. And if you judge Torah, you are not a doer of what Torah says, but a judge.

1 Peter 2:1

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, of all deceit, hypocrisy and envy, and of all the ways there are of speaking against people;

Additional New Testament Scriptures

2 Corinthians 12:20

Ephesians 4:29

Colossians 3:8

James 5:9

Related New Testament Mitzvot

AA22 Speaking Only That Which is Holy and Beneficial

DA23 Not Slandering or Giving False Testimony Against Our Neighbor

XA01 Gentiles Not Boasting or Speaking Against Jews

Supportive Tanakh Scriptures

Leviticus 19:16

Do not go around spreading slander among your people, but also don't stand idly by when your neighbor's life is at stake; I am ADONAI.

Numbers 12:1-10

Miryam and Aharon began criticizing Moshe on account of the Ethiopian woman he had married, for he had in fact married an Ethiopian woman. They said, "Is it true that ADONAI has spoken only with Moshe? Hasn't he spoken with us too?" ADONAI heard them. Now this man Moshe was very humble, more so than anyone on earth. Suddenly ADONAI told Moshe, Aharon and Miryam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." The three of them went out. ADONAI

came down in a column of cloud and stood at the entrance to the tent. He summoned Aharon and Miryam, and they both went forward. He said, "Listen to what I say: when there is a prophet among you, I, ADONAI, make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. But it isn't that way with my servant Moshe. He is the only one who is faithful in my entire household. With him I speak face to face and clearly, not in riddles; he sees the image of ADONAI. So why weren't you afraid to criticize my servant Moshe?" The anger of ADONAI flared up against them, and he left. But when the cloud was removed from above the tent, Miryam had tzara'at, as white as snow. Aharon looked at Miryam, and she was as white as snow.

Psalms 34:13(12)-14(13)

Which of you takes pleasure in living? Who wants a long life to see good things? [If you do,] keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceiving talk;

Proverbs 11:13

A gossip goes around revealing secrets, but a trustworthy person keeps a confidence.

Comment

This *Mitzvah* #DA64 is referred to in Jewish literature as “*lashon hara*” – evil speech. Slander is a form of *lashon hara* but differs from it (at least in contemporary usage) in that *lashon hara* is any pejorative speech about someone (true or not) whereas slander is pejorative speech that is untrue.¹ Gossip is *lashon hara* only if the information being spread is negative.

The above-referenced Scriptures have to do with the speaking of *lashon hara*, but what about giving a willing ear to it? I suggest that listening to *lashon hara* is also *sinful* – not with the tongue but with the ear – and perhaps is even more sinful than speaking it because the one who willfully listens to *lashon hara* becomes an enabler and a contributor to the sin of the one who speaks it. Here are two Scriptures that clearly show God’s attitude toward those who listen to the *lashon hara* of gossip:

Proverbs 16:27

A worthless person digs up evil [gossip] – it is like scorching fire on his lips.

Proverbs 20:19

A gossip goes around revealing secrets, so don't get involved with a talkative person.

There are at least four exceptions to *lashon hara*. First, speaking negatively about a person is permitted when it is intended for the person’s good and is accompanied by godly wisdom and discretion. Miryam’s offense of murmuring against Moses in Numbers 12:1-10 was that she did not intend what she said to be for Moses’ good. Had she said instead ..

“Aaron, I am worried about Moses because I think that marrying the Ethiopian woman was the wrong thing for him to do.”

¹ In the Hebrew Scriptures, “slander” is “*rakiyl*,” and in the Greek Scriptures it is “*blasphemeo*.” Translators use other English words for these as well (e.g. “talebearing”).

her comment, while still critical of Moses, would have been intended for Moses' good, and I do not believe she would not have been punished for what she said.

The second exception to *lashon hara* is when our negative words about a person are meant for justice. A situation in which this occurs is when we give testimony against a person in a *beit din* or a secular court of law. Deuteronomy 19:15 anticipates this through its instruction:

“One witness alone will not be sufficient to convict a person of any offense or sin of any kind; the matter will be established only if there are two or three witnesses testifying against him.”

The third exception to *lashon hara* is when our negative words about a person are in response to our having a special responsibility to speak. An example would be reporting a crime or the abuse of a child, or a juror deliberating with other jurors. Sha'ul himself made statements that would be considered *lashon hara* had he not been imbued with special apostolic responsibility for the congregations he was overseeing; consider, for example, his comments about his fellow *shaliach* Kefa:

Galatians 2:11-13

Furthermore, when Kefa came to Antioch, I opposed him publicly, because he was clearly in the wrong. For prior to the arrival of certain people from [the community headed by] Ya'akov, he had been eating with the Gentile believers; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he was afraid of the faction who favored circumcising Gentile believers. And the other Jewish believers became hypocrites along with him, so that even Bar-Nabba was led astray by their hypocrisy.”

Also, Sha'ul names names in 1 Timothy 1:19b-20:

“By rejecting conscience, some have made shipwreck of their trust; among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander. I have turned them over to the Adversary, so that they will learn not to insult God.”

The fourth exception to *lashon hara* is when a person who is privy to pejorative information about a person legitimately needs counsel as to what to do with the information or how to respond to it. Husbands and wives are not prohibited from confiding in each other, but sometimes it is best to seek advice from a counselor, or a pastor or mature believer who has no prior knowledge of the parties involved.

All speech (both complementary and critical) has spiritual power and can be used for both good and bad. It can bring comfort and it can distress; it can bring blessing and it can harm. As believers, our witness of Yeshua to those who do not know him requires that we be different than unbelievers, and one of the most noticeable ways of our being different is how we speak and how we respond to others who speak. Ridding ourselves of *lashon hara* is not an option – it is a commandment that we must take seriously.

Related Mitzvot in Volumes 1 & 2

H04 Using Our Speech, Thoughts, Hearts and Actions for that which Is Good and Holy

N02 Wronging One Another through Our Speech