



Halachos of
PROPER SPEECH



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Please note that the material presented is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to the halachos of Proper Speech. In any case of question or doubt a Rabbi should be consulted.

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Halachos of
PROPER SPEECH

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Day 1

This month we will learn halachos relevant to proper speech. Our learning will be divided into two parts; for the first half of the month (days 1 - 15) we will learn about the halachos of *emes*, being careful to speak the truth.

During the latter half of the month (days 16 - 30) we will cover some of the halachos of lashon hara.



Day 2

It is a Torah prohibition to tell a lie. Indeed, the Sefer HaChinuch notes that the Torah does not merely prohibit speaking falsehood, but rather instructs us מדבר שקר *תרחק*, **distance** yourselves from falsehood, due to the abhorrent nature of lying. One who is not careful to speak the truth cheapens their entire sense of humanity and undermines the very fabric of society.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ ס"ה-ו' והערה י"ז



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Day 3

One who is careful to only speak the truth fulfills the mitzvah **והלכת בדרכיו**, emulating and following in the ways of Hashem.

Being meticulous to avoid falsehood is a **segulah** for longevity.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ ס"א-ב'
בשם ספר החסידים וארחות צדיקים



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Day 4

Strictly speaking, saying an untruth in order to surprise someone (i.e. a surprise birthday party etc.), is not prohibited. Nonetheless, one should try to use language that does not constitute an outright lie. Indeed, ideally one should distance themselves from speaking falsehood altogether.

ות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ סי"ז



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Day 5

One who makes even an oral commitment to another may be halachically bound to keep their word, even if they did not promise to do so or even said *bli neder* (depending on the circumstances). As such, it is advisable for one to refrain from making outright statements of commitment to another and should instead employ more vague language.

To illustrate: Dina is planning to drive from Far Rockaway to Monsey. She knows that her friend Aviva could use a ride. Instead of telling Aviva definitively "I will take you to Monsey," Dina should rather say "I hope to be able to give you a ride," etc.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ סי"ד



Day 6

The importance that the Torah places on the value of truth cannot be overstated. In fact, Chazal tell us that the seal of Hashem is truth. Consequently, parents must take great care to instill in their children the value of fidelity to the truth. Additionally, a parent must be careful to follow through on a commitment made to a child; otherwise a child is likely to learn from such conduct that keeping one's word is not important.

For example: One evening, Gavriel's mother overhears him talking on the phone to his friend Shmuel, and say to him that later that evening he will call him back to go over their homework together. Later on, Gavriel's mother notices that he is doing his homework by himself, and he explains to her that he changed his mind and isn't interested in doing it with Shmuel. Gavriel's mother should impress upon Gavriel the importance of keeping his word and that he should follow through on what he said to Shmuel.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ ס"ג



Day 7

It is permitted to use words that are not factually true in order to communicate a specific idea. For example, one may put a sticker on their luggage that reads "Caution- glass inside," even if their luggage does not contain glass, but other fragile items. In such a circumstance, the words "glass inside," are really just meant to communicate that the contents of the suitcase are fragile and require delicate handling and is thus not considered a falsehood.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ סכ"ג



Day 8

We will now turn our attention to unique scenarios where speaking falsehood is permitted, and perhaps even a mitzvah. At the outset it must be stressed that one should not be quick to apply any of the leniencies we will discuss, and only apply them after careful consideration.

One who has **no alternative** may say falsehood for the sake of maintaining/creating peace between fellows. In such a scenario, ideally one should try to use words that are not false outright, and could possibly be understood in a manner that is actually true. To illustrate: The Cohens made a bar-mitzvah and wanting to keep the affair small, did not invite the Goldbergs. Subsequently, the Cohens heard that the Goldbergs were offended that they were not invited to the simcha. If she has no alternative, Mrs. Cohen may apologize to Mrs. Goldberg and tell her that she instructed one of her children to drop off the invitation but evidently the child forgot. However, saying so is an outright lie and, if possible, should be avoided. If feasible, it is better for Mrs. Cohen to apologize and say that "there was some mix up and a mistake happened." To apologize in such a way is not outright falsehood, because these words can mean that Mrs. Cohen got mixed up and made a mistake to not invite the Goldberg's.

חפץ חיים הל' רכילות כלל א' באמ"ח סקי"ד



Day 9

We have learned that one may say a falsehood for the sake of peace. This includes speaking falsehood to engender peace among children.

For example: Yehudah was very upset with his brother Naftali. When Naftali left to school, Yehudah smashed the Lego building Naftali had been carefully constructing. When Naftali comes home, his mother may tell him that she accidentally bumped into the Lego and caused it to break so that he should not be angry with his brother Yehudah.*

* It goes without saying that it is not worthwhile to lie for the sake of peace if there is a good chance that the truth will be revealed.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ סכ"ח



Day 10

One may say a falsehood in order to save another from embarrassment. (As mentioned above, if possible, one should try to say something that is not an outright lie.)

To illustrate: The Silver family received a suggestion for a shidduch for their daughter Ahuvah. If they would make known the true reason why they feel that the match is not appropriate, the boy's family is likely to take offense. In such a circumstance, the Silvers may give an alternate reason why they feel the match is not suitable in order to protect the boy's family from being embarrassed.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ הערה פ"ד



Day 11

It has been mentioned that one may speak dishonestly for the sake of peace. Included in this is offering a positive assessment of something/someone in order to make another feel good. One may offer such praise even if their opinion was not solicited. (As mentioned above, if possible, one should try to say a statement which is not an outright lie.)

A few practical applications of this idea:

- a) Rivkah's niece, Tirtzah, got engaged to a young man named Simcha. Mazel Tov! After meeting the new chosson, Aunt Rivkah may tell her niece Tirtzah that her chosson makes such a fine impression etc., even if in truth Rivkah did not have such a fond impression of him.
- b) Upon seeing her sister Avigayil's new baby, Zahava may tell Avigayil that the baby is very cute, even if the baby is not particularly endearing.
- c) Chaya is not overly enthused about her mother-in-law's cooking. Nonetheless, she may compliment her on her dishes in order to foster goodwill and make her mother-in-law feel good.

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ סכ"ח-כ"ט



Day 12

One may say a falsehood out of humility in order to hide a positive virtue or practice that one has. In fact, doing so is considered an act of piety.

For example: Shaindel visits an elderly woman every Shabbos afternoon. When questioned by her younger sister, Rachel, where she disappears every Shabbos afternoon, Shaindel does not need to disclose her destination and may merely say that she takes a walk.

מג"א ס' קנו סק"ב



Day 13

One may say a falsehood in order to maintain marital privacy. (As mentioned above, if possible, one should try to say something that is not an outright lie.)

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ סל"ד



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Day 14

One may say a falsehood in order to protect oneself from violating the Torah.

To illustrate: While visiting Eretz Yisrael, Boruch and Chedva went to visit Boruch's distant cousins. Shortly after arriving, they were offered a batch of homemade cookies. Boruch and Chedva were unsure of the meticulousness of this family in regard to keeping kosher. Boruch and Chedva may politely decline the offer of food and say that they are full and just ate, even if they are actually ravenously hungry.

כף החיים ס' תקס"ה סקל"ו



Day 15

One who went out on a date and was subsequently asked where they were does not need to disclose what they were up to. (As mentioned above, if possible, one should try to say something that is not an outright lie.)

הליכות בין אדם לחבירו פ"כ סמ"ח



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Day 16

For the duration of the month we will turn our attention to the halachos of lashon hara. Lashon hara can be defined as speaking negative – accurate - information about another Jew. To illustrate: Unfortunately, Rina's teacher is utterly unqualified to teach and does a very poor job presenting her lessons. Although this is an objective truth and not simply Rina's subjective evaluation, Rina may not mention to others that her teacher is incompetent etc., and doing so is lashon hara.

If the negative speech is not true, it is classified as *motzi shem ra*, which is more severe than lashon hara.

To illustrate: Chaya's younger sister Batya can occasionally be difficult. If Chaya complains to a friend, "Oh, Batya just annoys me non-stop, I can't take it!" she is exaggerating the negativity and thus is violating the prohibition of *motzi shem ra*.

Even just alluding or intimating negativity about another Jew is included in the prohibition of lashon hara.*

* Note: The halachos of lashon hara are detailed and intricate. As always, our goal is not to provide a comprehensive and complete treatment of all of the halachos relevant to a particular topic, but to present some of the more practical halachos in a straightforward, concise format. In any case of doubt one should consult a halachic authority.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל א' ס"ח



Day 17

It is prohibited to speak lashon hara even under duress or if one is being pressured to do so.

For example: Penina's friend, Malka, is badgering her to give her information regarding a certain story that took place with Leah. If the story reflects poorly on Leah, Penina may not give in to Malka's persistent attempts to get her to relay the story (to be continued).

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל א' ס"ה-ו'



Day 18

It was previously mentioned that one may not speak lashon hara even when being pressured by another or under duress. Even if one stands to lose their job by not saying the lashon hara, one is prohibited from doing so and must forfeit their job rather than speak lashon hara.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל א' ס"ה-ו'



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Day 19

Lashon hara applies to all forms of communication, whether oral or written etc. Thus, emailing or texting etc., something negative about another is classic lashon hara.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל א' ס"ח



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Day 20

Lashon hara is not limited to one who intends to put down or harm another through derogatory speech. Even one who speaks negatively about another in a joking, playful manner, violates the prohibition of lashon hara.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ג' ס"ג



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Day 21

Even if one does not explicitly mention the name of the individual they are speaking negatively about, if the listener understands who the speaker is referring to, it is considered lashon hara.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ג' ס"ד



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Day 22

It is considered lashon hara to speak negatively about the product of another Jew.

To illustrate: One may not say "Oh, I never shop at SuperKosherPlus because their produce is never fresh."

For the same reason, it may not be permitted to write a negative review of another Jew's product. Under certain circumstances, this may be permitted based on the idea of *toeles*, positive benefit, as will be discussed below.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ה' ס"ז



Day 23

It is prohibited to say something negative about another even if the person who is being spoken about doesn't usually mind that people say such things about them.

For example: Chaviva is habitually late, and oftentimes jokes about it with her friends. Nonetheless, Shira may not tell Mindel, "Of course we missed the chuppah- we had to wait for Chaviva!" Despite the fact that Chaviva herself often jokes about her tardiness, for Shira to say this is considered lashon hara.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ח' ס"א



Day 24

One who has been wrongfully suspected of doing something may **not** speak lashon hara about someone else in order to clear their own name. One is not required to take the blame on behalf of another, and can maintain their innocence, but is not permitted to disclose the identity of the true wrongdoer.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל י' סי"ז



Day 25

The Torah prohibition against speaking lashon hara applies only to speaking about live people, not to the deceased.

Nonetheless, there is a prohibition from the Geonim against speaking derogatorily about those who have already passed on.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ח' ס"ט



Day 26

The prohibition of lashon hara includes speaking negatively about another Jew, whether one is speaking to a fellow Jew or to a non-Jew. However, there is no prohibition against speaking lashon hara about a non-Jew. Nevertheless, one should endeavor to be the type of person for whom spreading negativity about others is totally foreign, even when it is not strictly prohibited.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל חי



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Day 27

Thus far we have discussed the prohibition of speaking lashon hara. Additionally, it is prohibited to believe lashon hara that one hears. In fact, even listening to/reading lashon hara is prohibited. Under certain circumstances, listening to/reading lashon hara is permitted, as will be discussed below.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ו'



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Day 28

One may listen to/read lashon hara that provides information that would inform how one would conduct themselves.

To illustrate: Generally speaking, one may not read negative reviews of a Jew's product as this constitutes "listening" to lashon hara (see above that one may not speak negatively about a Jew's product). Nonetheless, if one is reading the reviews in order to help determine if they want to purchase the product, one is permitted to do so. Even when one is permitted to read/hear the lashon hara, they are not permitted to accept the information as absolute truth; rather they should accept the information as cause for concern (to be continued).

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ו' ס"ב



Day 29

It was previously mentioned that, generally speaking, one may not listen/read lashon hara. One is permitted to listen to lashon hara if they assess that by hearing the information they may be in a position to contradict the lashon hara that was spoken and uphold or defend the reputation of the individual being spoken about.

To illustrate: Chedvah, a camp counselor, is having a very difficult time with one of the girls in her bunk and starts complaining about the girl to her co-counselor, Shevy. Shevy may hear Chedvah out in order to be able to explain to her why the girl is not as terrible as Chedvah is making her out to be.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל ו' ס"ד



Day 30

Under specific circumstances, one may share information with another that is lashon hara, if knowledge of such information is to the practical benefit of the listener. This is known as the leniency of "*toeles*," positive benefit. Such information may only be shared if the following conditions are met:

- a) The speaker has absolutely certainty that what they are saying is accurate.
- b) The speaker doesn't exaggerate the negative information whatsoever.
- c) There is no alternative to helping the listener besides for relating this information.
- d) The speaker is relating the information solely for the sake of benefitting the listener, not because they want to put the other person down, etc.
- e) As a result of hearing the negative information, the individual who was spoken about will not be adversely affected in a way contrary to the halacha.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר כלל י' ס"ב



Day 31

Unfortunately, it is well known that speaking lashon hara is somewhat commonplace. Given the extreme severity of the prohibition against speaking lashon hara, how can this be so? The Chafetz Chaim writes that speaking lashon hara is so rampant because people are accustomed from their youth to wantonly speak badly about others. Thus, by the time people mature and get older, it is difficult for them to change this terrible habit of their youth. Therefore, says the Chafetz Chaim, parents have a tremendous responsibility to be *mechanech* their children to use speech only in a positive manner.

חפץ חיים הלי לה"ר ככל ט ס"ה בהגהה



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Mazel Tov
on completing a month
of Halacha Yomi!