



The Rubin Feldman Memorial Monthly Mussar Message

"The Power Of Words"

Practical Steps for Improving Our Lives and Our Relationships

Brought to you by

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In Loving Memory of Dear Friend Mr. Rubin Feldman, a"h

Through the generosity of Mrs. Gloria Feldman and Family

Everyone knows that *lashon hara*, evil speech, is considered a sin. However, many don't realize the severity of this transgression. The Chofetz Chaim makes a list of thirty one commandments in the *Torah*, that a person transgresses when speaking *lashon hara*. This teaches us how careful one must be to prevent such a colossal sin from transpiring. On the flip side, one gets unbelievable reward for staying away from speaking evil in all situations.

There is one commandment in the *Torah* that specifically addresses the obligation to guard one's tongue. The verse states (*Vayikra*: 19:16) "*Lo seileich rachil b'amecha*", You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people. The usage of the word "*rachil*" seems rather perplexing. The literal translation of the word "*rachil*" is peddler. Why would the *Torah* use the word peddler to describe someone who spreads gossip? *Rashi*, in his monumental commentary of the *Torah* explains that a peddler's job requires him to trudge to each and every house trying to sell his wares.

Similarly, a gossipmonger goes from one house to the next trying to find out as much evil information and negative conduct to reveal to the world. In order to be a good gossip, a person has to know where to find all the juicy information. The *Torah* is warning against looking into and investigating others in order to speak maliciously about them.

Humans by nature are always looking to disclose to others great gossip that they just found out about. It is extremely difficult to stop oneself once one already knows the juicy information. If one wouldn't even know the information in the first place, then it would be so much easier to stay away from sinning with our mouths. This is why the emphasis of the *Torah* is on not being a "*rachil*", a peddler. Don't find out the gossip in the first place and you'll never be tempted to leak the gossip.

The Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky (1899-1985), was hearing impaired towards the end of his life. However, he would not think of putting hearing aids into his ears. When asked what was holding him back from this simple solution, Rabbi Kanievsky explained "No one will go to the trouble of shouting *lashon hara* into my ears. The things that are necessary, I somehow manage to hear. So what do I need it for?"

This is extremely difficult to fathom. The Steipler was no regular person; he was one of the greatest Rabbis in Israel. Yet, he was willing to forgo being able to hear any conversation decently for many years to stop himself from possibly hearing evil talk. How much more so, ordinary Jews, such as ourselves, who are not on Rabbi Kanievsky's great level need to be careful in this area. He understood that one needs to make barriers to prevent oneself from hearing or speaking *lashon hara*. Similarly, we should make a barrier and not even find out gossip, and therefore never come to speak the gossip.