

Lashon Hara – Ethics of Speech

Lashon hara is hurtful speech, the making of damaging or derogatory remarks that might cause a person physical, psychological or financial harm. It is *lashon hara* even when you incriminate yourself in the telling.

Here are nine rules to remember:

1. It is *lashon hara* to convey a derogatory image of someone even if that image is true and deserved; it is slanderous to do so when the image is false.
2. It is *lashon hara* to convey information about people that can cause them physical, psychological or financial harm.
3. It is *lashon hara* to embarrass people, even in jest, or to tell embarrassing things about them when they are not present.
4. *Lashon hara* is not limited to verbal communication. The written word, body language, innuendo and the like can also be hurtful.
5. It is *lashon hara* to speak against a community, race, ethnic group, gender or age group as a whole.
6. Do not relate *lashon hara* even to your spouse, close friends or relatives.
7. Do not repeat *lashon hara* even when it is common knowledge.
8. Avoid *r'chilut*: Do not relate to people negative things other people may say about them, for this may cause needless conflict.
9. Do not listen to *lashon hara* or *r'chilut*. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

Note: It is not *lashon hara* to warn a person about potential dangers resulting from not-as-yet finalized business or personal relationships. Be careful to tell only what you know to be factually true; do not exaggerate; do not pass on hearsay; be clear that your intent is to help the other and not to further your own ends.