

הלכות דעות • פרק שביעי

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, the Rambam guides us through the severe prohibitions of lashon horah (evil speech), rechilus (gossip), and the destructive traits of taking revenge and bearing a grudge. We learn how careful a Yid must be with his tongue, as Hashem detests these sins which can destroy lives and tear apart the fabric of our community.

The Rambam also defines the subtle offshoots of these sins, known as the "dust of lashon horah," showing us how even seemingly innocent talk, joking, or praising someone in front of their enemies can lead to terrible harm. We are taught the proper way to purify our hearts and speech to live in harmony with our fellow Jews.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

הלכה א

Halacha 1: The Prohibition Against Gossiping and Talebearing

המרגל בחרו

One who gossips against his fellow

עובר בלא תעשה

transgresses a negative commandment,

שנאמר

as it is said in the Torah (Vayikra 19:16):

"לא תלך רכיל בעמך."

"Do not go as a talebearer among your people."

ואף על פי שאין לוקין על דבר זה

And even though we do not lash the transgressor for this matter, since it is a prohibition that does not involve a physical action,

עון גדול הוא

it is a great sin

וגורם להרג נפשות רבות מישראל.

and it causes the killing of many souls from Israel.

לכה נסמך לו

Therefore, this warning is juxtaposed to it in the very same verse:

"וְלֹא תִעָמַד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ."

"and do not stand by the blood of your neighbor."

צֵא וְלִמַּד מָה אֶרַע לְדֹאֵג הָאֶדְמִי:

Go out and learn what befell Doeg the Edomite, whose lashon hara caused the destruction of the entire city of Nov, the city of Kohanim.

הַלָּכָה ב

Halacha 2· The Distinction Between Gossip, Lashon Horah, and Defamation of Character

אִי זֶהוּ רֹכֵל.

Who is a gossip? This refers to

זֶה שְׁטוֹעַן דְּבָרִים וְהוֹלֵךְ מִזֶּה לָזֶה

this person who carries matters and goes from this one to this one

וְאוֹמֵר כֹּךְ אָמַר פְּלוֹנִי

and says, "Thus said so-and-so,

כֹּךְ וְכֵן שָׁמַעְתִּי עַל פְּלוֹנִי.

thus and so I heard about so-and-so."

אֲף עַל פִּי שֶׁהוּא אֱמֶת

Even though the report is truth,

הִרִי זֶה מִמַּחְרִיב אֶת הָעוֹלָם.

behold, this behavior destroys the world.

יֵשׁ עוֹן גָּדוֹל מִזֶּה עַד מָאֵד

There is a sin greater than this until very much,

וְהוּא בִּכְלָל לְאוֹ זֶה

and it is also included in the prohibition of this verse,

וְהוּא לְשׁוֹן הָרַע.

and it is lashon horah.

וְהוּא הַמְסַפֵּר בִּגְנוּת חֲבֵרוֹ

And this is the one who relates the disgrace of his fellow,

אף על פי שאומר אמת.

even though he says truth.

אבל האומר שקר

But the one who says falsehood

נקרא מוציא שם רע על חברו.

is called one who spreads a bad name about his fellow.

אבל בעל לשון הרע

But a master of lashon horah

זה שיושב ואומר

is this person who sits and says,

כה וכה עשה פלוני

"Thus and so did so-and-so,

וכה וכה היו אבותיו

and thus and so were his ancestors,

וכה וכה שמעתי עליו"

and thus and so I heard about him,"

ואמר דברים של גנאי.

and says matters of disgrace.

על זה אמר הכתוב

About this, the verse says:

"יִכַּרְתֶּהוּ כָּל שִׁפְתֵי חֶלְקוֹת לְשׁוֹן מְדַבֶּרֶת גְּדִלוֹת":

"May Hashem cut off all lips of flattery, a tongue that speaks proud things."

הלכה ג

Halacha 3 · The Extreme Severity and Punishment of Speaking Lashon Hara

אמרו חכמים

The Sages said:

שֶׁלֹּשׁ עֲבֻרוֹת נִפְרָעִין מִן הָאָדָם בְּעוֹלָם הַבְּיָאָה

For three transgressions, retribution is exacted from a person in this world,

ואין לו חלק לעולם הבא.

and he has no portion in the World to Come.

עבודת כוכבים וגלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים.

They are: **worship of stars** (idolatry), **uncovering of nakedness** (forbidden sexual relations), and **spilling of blood** (murder).

ולשון הרע כנגד כלם.

And lashon hara is against—meaning, equal in weight to—all of them.

ועוד אמרו חכמים

And further, the Sages said:

כל המספר בלשון הרע כאלו כופר בעקר.

Anyone who speaks with lashon hara is as if he denies the **Essence** of Hashem's sovereignty,

שנאמר "אשר אמרו ללשוננו נגביר שפתינו אתנו מי אדון לנו".

as it is said in Tehillim, "Who said, 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are with us, who is master over us?'"

ועוד אמרו חכמים

And further, the Sages said:

שלשה לשון הרע הורגת.

Three people lashon hara kills:

האומר. והמקבל. וזה שאומר עליו.

The one who speaks it, and the one who accepts it, and this one whom he speaks about.

והמקבל לו יותר מן האומר:

And the one who accepts it is harmed even more than the one who speaks it.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4 · The Dust of Lashon Horah and Speaking Through Deceit or Jest

ויש דברים שהם אבק לשון הרע.

And there are matters that they are the dust of lashon horah, meaning they are not direct lashon horah but lead to it or contain a trace of it.

כיצד.

How so?

מי יאמר לפלוני שיהיה כמות שהוא עתה.

For example, one **who will say to so-and-so that he should** continue to be like that he is now, which hints that his current behavior is not proper.

או שיאמר שתקו מפלוני איני רוצה להודיע מה ארע ומה היה.

Or that he says, "Be silent from speaking about so-and-so, I do not want to make known what happened and what was," which arouses curiosity and implies something bad occurred.

וכיוצא בדברים האלו.

And like the matters these, which subtly damage a person's reputation.

וכל המספר בטובת חברו בפני שונאיו הרי זה אבק לשון הרע

And anyone who speaks of the goodness of his fellow in the presence of his enemies, behold this is the dust of lashon horah,

שזה גורם להם שיספרו בגנותו.

for this causes them that they will speak of his disparagement in order to counter the praise.

ועל זה הענין אמר שלמה

And on this matter said Shlomo in his wisdom in Sefer Mishlei:

"מְבָרֵךְ רֵעֵהוּ בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל בִּבְקֹר הַשָּׁפִּים קִלְלָה תִּחָּשֵׁב לוֹ."

"One who blesses his fellow with a voice loud in the morning rising early, a curse it will be considered for him,"

שמתוה טובתו בא לידי רעתו.

for from his goodness, meaning the praise he receives, it comes to his harm.

וכן המספר בלשון הרע דרך שחוק ודרך קלות ראש

And so too one who speaks with lashon horah by way of jest and by way of levity,

כלומר שאינו מדבר בשנאה.

meaning that he does not speak with hatred but merely for amusement.

הוא ששלמה אמר בחכמתו

He is the one of whom Shlomo said in his wisdom in Sefer Mishlei:

"כַּמֶּתֶלֶה לֵהּ הִיָּה זָקִים חֲצִים וּמוֹת"

"As a madman who shoots firebrands, arrows, and death,"

ואמר הלא משחק אני."

"and says, 'Am I not joking?'"

וְכֵן הַמְסַפֵּר לְשׁוֹן הָרַע דֶּרֶךְ רַמְאוֹת

And so too one who speaks lashon horah by way of deceit,

וְהוּא שֶׁיִּסְפֹּר לְתַמּוֹ כְּאִלּוּ אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁדָּבָר זֶה לְשׁוֹן הָרַע הוּא

and he is one who speaks in his innocence, as if he does not know that matter this that he spoke, lashon horah it is,

אֶלָּא כְּשֶׁמִּמְחִין בּוֹ אוֹמֵר אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁדָּבָר זֶה לְשׁוֹן הָרַע

rather, when they protest against him, he says, "I do not know that matter this is lashon horah,

אוֹ שֶׁאֵלּוּ מַעֲשָׂיו שֶׁל פְּלוֹנִי:

or that these are the deeds of so-and-so."

הַלָּכָה ה

Halacha 5 · The Definition of Lashon Horah and the Rule of Disclosure Before Three People

אֶחָד הַמְסַפֵּר בְּלִשׁוֹן הָרַע בְּפָנֵי חֲבֵירוֹ אוֹ שְׁלֹא בְּפָנָיו,

It is the same whether one speaks lashon hara in the presence of his fellow who is being spoken about, or not in his presence,

וְהַמְסַפֵּר דְּבָרִים שְׁגוֹרְמִים אִם נִשְׁמָעוּ אִישׁ מִפִּי אִישׁ לְהַזִּיק חֲבֵירוֹ בְּגוּפוֹ אוֹ בְּמָמוֹנוֹ,

and so too one who tells matters that cause, if they are heard by passing from man from the mouth of man, to harm his fellow in his body or in his money,

וְאִפְּלוּ לְהַצִּיר לוֹ אוֹ לְהַפְחִידוֹ, הֲרִי זֶה לְשׁוֹן הָרַע.

and even if the words only cause to distress him or to frighten him, behold this is considered lashon hara.

וְאִם נֶאֱמְרוּ דְּבָרִים אֵלּוּ בְּפָנֵי שְׁלֹשָׁה כְּכֹר נִשְׁמָע הַדָּבָר וְנוֹדָע.

And if these matters were said in the presence of three people, already the matter is heard and known to the public.

וְאִם סִפֵּר הַדָּבָר אֶחָד מִן הַשְּׁלֹשָׁה פַּעַם אַחֶרֶת אֵין בּוֹ מִשּׁוֹם לְשׁוֹן הָרַע.

And if one of the three told the matter a second time, there is not in it a prohibition because of lashon hara.

וְהוּא שֶׁלֹּא יִתְכַּוֵּן לְהַעֲבִיר הַקּוֹל וּלְגַלּוֹתוֹ יוֹתֵר:

And that is provided that he does not intend to spread the rumor and to reveal it more than it has already been revealed.

הַלָּכָה ו

Halacha 6 · Distancing Oneself from Speakers of Lashon Horah and the Desert Decree

כָּל אֵלּוּ הֵם בְּעָלֵי לְשׁוֹן הָרַע

All of these are masters of lashon horah,

שְׂאִסוּר לְדוּר בְּשִׁכְנוֹתָם

that it is forbidden to dwell in their neighborhood,

וְכָל שָׂכֵן לֵישֵׁב עִמָּהֶם וְלִשְׁמָע דְּבָרֵיהֶם.

and all the more so to sit with them and to hear their words.

וְלֹא נִחְתָּם גִּזְרֵי דִין עַל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר

And not was sealed the decree of judgment against our ancestors in the desert,

אֶלָּא עַל לְשׁוֹן הָרַע לְבַד:

except for lashon horah alone.

הִלְכָּה ז

Halacha 7: The Prohibition of Taking Revenge and the Virtue of Rising Above One's Feelings

הַנּוֹקֵם מִחֲבֵירוֹ עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה

One who takes revenge from his colleague transgresses a negative commandment,

שְׁנַיִמָּר לֹא תִקָּם.

as it is said in the Torah, "Do not take revenge."

וְאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁאֵינוֹ לֹקָה עָלָיו

And even though it is a prohibition that does not involve an action, and therefore that he is not lashed for it,

דֵּעָה רָעָה הִיא עַד מְאֹד.

nevertheless, a trait bad it is, until very much so.

אֶלָּא רָאוּי לוֹ לְאָדָם לִהְיוֹת מַעֲבִיר עַל מְדוּתָיו

Rather, it is proper for him, for a person, to be one who passes over his feelings

עַל כָּל דְּבָרֵי הָעוֹלָם

over all matters of the world,

שֶׁהַכָּל אֶצֶל הַמְּבִינִים דְּבָרֵי הֶכֶל וְהֶבְאִי

for everything, according to those of understanding, are matters of vanity and emptiness,

וְאֵינָן כְּדַאי לְנָקָם עֲלֵיהֶם.

and they are not worth taking revenge for them.

כיצד היא הנקימה.

How is the taking of revenge defined? If one said to him, to his colleague, "Lend me your hatchet," and the colleague said to him, "I will not lend you."

למחר צריה לשאל ממנו,

On the morrow, he, the first person, needs to borrow from him, the second person.

אמר לו חבירו השאילני קרדמה,

He said to him, to his colleague, "Lend me your hatchet."

אמר לו איני משאילה כדרךך שלא השאלתני כששאלתי ממך,

And the first person said to him, "I will not lend you, just as that not you lent me when I asked from you."

הרי זה נוקם.

Behold, this is taking revenge.

אלא כשיבוא לו לשאל יתן בלב שלם

Rather, when he comes to him to borrow, he should give with a heart whole,

ולא יגמל לו כאשר גמלו.

and not repay him just as he repaid him.

וכן כל כיוצא באלו.

And so all similar to these cases.

וכן אמר דוד בדעותיו הטובות

And so said Dovid regarding his traits, the good ones, in Tehillim 7:5:

"אם גמלתי שולמי רע ואחלצה וגו':

"If I have repaid my ally evil, and I rescued my oppressor without cause," etc.

הלכה ח

Halacha 8 · The Prohibition Against Bearing a Grudge and the Proper Character Trait

וכן כל הנוטר לאחד מישראל עובר בלא תעשה

And so, anyone who bears a grudge against one of Israel transgresses a negative commandment,

שנאמר ויקרא יט יח "ולא תטר את בני עמך".

as it is said in Vayikra 19:18, "and you shall not bear a grudge against the children of your people."

כיצד היא הנטירה.

How is the bearing of a grudge defined?

ראובן שאמר לשמעון השכיר לי בית זה או השאלני שור זה ולא רצה שמעון.

Take Reuven who said to Shimon, "Rent to me this house," or "Lend me this ox," and Shimon did not want to do so.

למים בא שמעון לראובן לשאל ממנו או לשכר ממנו

After days had passed, Shimon came to Reuven to borrow from him or to rent from him,

ואמר לו ראובן הא לה הריני משאילך ואיני כמותך לא אשלם לך כמעשיך.

and Reuven said to him, "Here is it for you, behold I am lending to you, and I am not like you; I will not repay to you like your deeds."

העושה כזה עובר בלא תטר.

The one who does like this transgresses the negative commandment of "you shall not bear a grudge."

אלא ימחה הדבר מלבו ולא יטרנו.

Rather, he must wipe the matter from his heart and not bear a grudge about it.

שכל זמן שהוא נוטר את הדבר וזוכרו שמה יבוא לנקם.

For all time that he bears a grudge regarding the matter and remembers it, perhaps he will come to take revenge.

לפיכך הקפידה תורה על הנטירה עד שימחה העון מלבו ולא יזכרנו כלל.

Therefore, the Torah was strict about the bearing of a grudge, until a person reaches the point that he wipes the offense from his heart and does not remember it at all.

וזו היא הדעה הנכונה שאפשר שיתקיים בה ישוב הארץ

And this is the correct character trait, through which it is possible that the settlement of the land will be sustained,

ומשאם ומתנם של בני אדם זה עם זה:

as well as the business dealings of human beings, one with another.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Rambam begins by defining rechilus and lashon horah, explaining that even speaking the truth about a colleague in a disparaging way is a severe sin equivalent to the three cardinal sins. He warns us against the "dust of lashon horah"—which includes sly remarks, insincere jokes, or praising someone in front of those who dislike him—and forbids us from living near or sitting with those who speak evil. Finally, the Rambam details the prohibitions of taking revenge and bearing a grudge, explaining that a person must rise above worldly matters, wipe any resentment from his heart, and help his fellow Jew with a full heart even if he was previously mistreated.

My dear talmid, when you look closely at this sugya, you see that the Torah is not just warning us against telling lies or causing physical harm. The Chazal tell us that lashon hara is equivalent to the three worst sins, and that the decree on our ancestors in the desert was sealed only because of it. Why is this? Because the way we speak and the way we react to others is the very foundation of our emunah. When a person speaks lashon hara, or when he holds a grudge and says, 'I won't lend to you because you didn't lend to me,' he is acting as if he is the master of his own world, forgetting that Hashem is in charge of everything.

The Rambam teaches us that a person of understanding looks at all these petty worldly matters, who lent what, who said what, who insulted whom, as utter vanity. When someone refuses to help you, or when you feel the urge to share a juicy piece of gossip, the yetzer hara wants you to believe that this moment is the most important thing in the world. But the true avodah of a Yid is to rise above these small feelings, to wipe the slate clean, and to realize that keeping peace and protecting another Yid's dignity is what truly matters to Hashem.

Today, when someone asks you for a favor, or when you are tempted to remind someone of how they let you down in the past, do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge. Give with a whole heart, erase the memory of their slight from your mind entirely, and speak only words that build up your fellow Jew.