

LOWLY LOSHON HARA

לשון הרע ורכילות

In the spring of 2020 the entire human race was thrust in to a state of unprecedented social isolation, due to the Covid-19 virus.

It has always been the approach of the Jewish people – the nation entrusted with the “Guidelines for Life” called the Torah – to seek out the messages that the Almighty is attempting to communicate to His people through world events. The great Rabbinical figures of this period of time found precedence of this phenomenon of social isolation in the Torah’s description of the *Metzora*: one who is banished from society and forced in to a state of self-reflective isolation as a result of *Lashon Hara* – speaking negatively of others.

The faculty of speech, uniquely entrusted to the Human being, is a tool of enormous potential. Used properly, positive speech has the capacity to build relationships and lift up spirits. Misused, however, negative speech has the power to destroy relationships and cause strife amongst people; social isolation at its very root.

Learning about some of the fundamental concepts and rules of Lashon Hara is one of the most potent ways to mend these relationships.

In this learning session we’ll explore the following issues:

- **What is the Torah’s general attitude regarding negative speech?**
- **What is the difference between *Rechilus* and *Lason Hara*?**
- **What is the Biblical source(s) for each of these prohibitions?**
- **What exactly is so bad about speaking disparagingly of others?**
- **Does it make a difference if the subject will not even hear about it?**
- **Is one allowed to speak negatively about inanimate objects?**

*Based on shiurim from Rabbi Yitchok Berkovitz shlita
Arranged by R’ Aaron Krongold*

**1 – BASIC SOURCES:
A DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTER**

Source 1. Vayikra 19:16

“Do not go about as a travelling-salesman amongst your nation; do not stand by on your neighbours’ blood, I am G-d”	לֹא-תֵלֵךְ רֹכֵל בְּעַמֶּיךָ לֹא תַעֲמֵד עַל-דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה
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The literal translation of a “רֹכֵל” is a salesman who travels around to sell his goods. What does it mean not to walk around in the manner of a “travelling salesman”; what is that referring to? The Oral Torah fills in the blanks:

Source 2. Kesuvos 46a

Where do we find the warning against slanderous speech? R’ Elazar says that it’s from the verse “ <i>Do not go about as a travelling salesman</i> ” (Vayikra 19:16)	אזהרה למוציא שם רע מנלך ר' אלעזר אמר מלא תלך רכיל (דברים יט:טז)
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Chazal teach us that this “travelling salesman” is somebody whose product is gossip; someone who goes around ‘selling’ his juicy news about this one and the other. In other words, this verse is the source for the Biblical prohibition of *Rechilus*, and, according to the Rambam, **also** the prohibition of *Lashon Hara*, as we shall see below (we’ll define what these two terms are, exactly, shortly – for now we’ll just generalize it as ‘negative speech’).

Question: Why did the Torah choose to phrase this prohibition in such awkward words? It seems almost sarcastic for a book as classic and precise as the Torah to tell us not to be a ‘travelling salesman’ – why not just say it straight: *don’t speak negatively of others!*?

What do you think??

The great medieval commentators, Rashi and the Ramban, explain along the same lines that the concept being discussed in the verse is the sub-culture of the gossip club¹: the basic underlying message is that the prohibitions of *Rechilus* and *Lashon Hara* are essentially not just a sin against one’s fellow man, but rather also that by choosing to dwell on the negative qualities of another one is fundamentally degrading oneself. In other words,

¹ Rashi and the Ramban come to explain the mysterious words of the Targum Onkulus, who translates the verse as “לֹא תִיכֹל קוֹרְצִין”: Rashi explains that what this is referring to is a type of social club that used to get together after a solid round of character-assassination to share a celebratory dish of sorts, to signify their devious triumph over their un-knowing victim. The Ramban explains that “לֹא תִיכֹל קוֹרְצִין” isn’t referring to eating something together, but, rather, to making sounds; he describes the way one who is bearing gossip – the product, or “goods” – shows up, and, using his body mannerisms he indicates to his friends that he’s got something good for them, until they egg him on to cough it up. The common denominator of both these explanations is that the Torah is warning one to steer clear of participating in the sub-culture of the gossip club.

Answer:

The verse is not merely instructing a person what not to *do*, but, rather, who not to *be*. It's more than simply a description of *action*, but, also, a description of *character*.

The Ramban explains how this idea is illustrated in the very terminology of the verse itself:

Source 3. Ramban, ibid

A *rochel* (in its literal translation) is one who travels from here to there, selling in various places, as our sages alluded to: "The *rochlin* who travel amongst the cities" [Maasros 2:3].

This is also the reason that the verse says "amongst your nation", for he travels amongst the public (i.e. the nation). However, there is a distinction between the term *rochel* and *racheel*: *rochel* is the description of what someone does, whereas *racheel* is the description of one's essential character, similar to the terms "Sarees" (one who is castrated) and "nazeer" (a Nazarite, who's prohibited from benefiting from wine-related products). This alludes to the fact that it's a description of essential character.

כי הרוכל הולך כל היום קונה מכאן ומכאן והולך ומוכר במקומות אחרים בכאן ובכאן כמו שמזכירין חכמים "רוכלין המחזירין בעיירות" [מעשרות ב:ג].

וזה טעם "בעמך", כי הוא הולך ברבים. ולהבדיל בין שניהם היה שם זה "רוכל" פועל ושם זה "רכיל" שם תואר בעצמו, כמו "סריס", "נזיר", ירמוז השם כי בנפשו הוא ועליו תשוב.

Amazing! The very word "*racheel*" (as opposed to "*rochel*") alludes to the theme of the verse: it's a description of intrinsic character, beyond simply a technical prohibition of action – ***don't just not speak negatively about others (i.e. in action), rather, don't become the type of person who views the world of others through a negative lens (i.e. in essential character).***

This expanded connotation of the verse has significant ramifications, as we'll proceed to learn.

2 – RAMBAM & RAAVAD WHICH IS WORSE?

Until now we have been generalizing things under the general banner of “negative speech.” The truth is, however, that there are actually two different types of speech which are Biblically prohibited: “Rechilus”, and “Lashon Hara.”

The Rambam describes the difference between the two, as well as the scriptural source for each prohibition:

Source 4. Rambam, Laws of Deyos 7:1-3

<p>1. One who gossips about his fellow transgresses a negative commandment, as it says in the verse “Do not go about as a travelling salesman amongst your nation.” Now, even though one does not receive lashes for this, it is nevertheless a great iniquity which causes the destruction of many souls from the Jewish people, and it is for this reason that it is juxtaposed to “do not stand by idly by your neighbours blood.”</p> <p>2. Who is a gossip (rachil)? One who carries things and goes from one to another and says, "Thus and thus did so and so say, such and such did I hear about so and so." Even though it is the truth, he destroys the world!</p> <p>There is a much greater sin than this - and it is included in this negative commandment - and that is evil speech (<i>lashon hara</i>). This is referring to one who speaks disparagingly about his fellow, even though it is true.</p>	<p>א. הַמְרַגֵּל בְּחֵבְרוֹ עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה שְׁנֵאמַר (ויקרא יט טז) "לֹא תֵלֵךְ רַכִּיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ". וְאֵף עַל פִּי שְׂאִין לֹקִין עַל דְּבַר זֶה עוֹן גָּדוֹל הוּא וְגוֹרָם לְהַרְגַּנְפְּשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל. לְכֹה נִסְמָךְ לוֹ "וְלֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ"...</p> <p>ב. אִי זֶהוּ רַכִּיל. זֶה שְׂטוֹעֵן דְּבָרִים וְהוֹלֵךְ מִזֶּה לְזֶה וְאוֹמֵר כְּהָ אָמַר פְּלוֹנִי כְּהָ וְכָה שְׂמַעְתִּי עַל פְּלוֹנִי. אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁהוּא אֵמַת הָרִי זֶה מַחְרִיב אֶת הָעוֹלָם.</p> <p>יֵשׁ עוֹן גָּדוֹל מִזֶּה עַד מְאֹד וְהוּא בְּכֻלּוֹ לֹא זֶה וְהוּא לְשׁוֹן הָרַע. וְהוּא הַמְסַפֵּר בְּגִנּוּת חֵבְרוֹ אֵף עַל פִּי שְׂאוֹמֵר אֵמַת.</p>
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- *Rechilus* means to cause animosity amongst people by way of speech
 - The speech need **not** be intrinsically negative: it’s enough to simply say **anything** about the subject to the listener which will arouse the slightest degree of animosity.²
- *Lashon Hara* means to speak negatively of another
 - i.e. even without causing any ‘friction’ between the subject and the listener

According to the Rambam, the verse “Do not go about as a gossip monger” is the source for **both** of these prohibitions: if *Rechilus* is forbidden (which is the explicit subject of the verse), then all the more so *Lashon Hara* is prohibited.

- This logical inference is based on the premise that, as the Rambam says explicitly, *Lashon Hara* is ‘worse’ or ‘more-severe’ than *Rechilus*.

The Rambam’s great Talmudic nemesis, the “Raavad”, however, flatly rejects this assertion, and argues that the opposite is true!!

² For example, conveying to the listener that ‘Joe’ (the subject) thinks he’s better at basketball than ‘Steve’ (the listener): even though there’s nothing intrinsically derogatory about this comment, nevertheless the mere fact that it causes tension renders it *Rechilus*.

Source 5. Raavad, ibid

<p>“A master of evil speech is one who sits and says...” – Says Avraham: Incorrect! Rather, the first is more severe than the second; for the prior is a 3rd-party accomplice who causes the death of others, whereas the latter only destroys himself. Understand this well!</p>	<p>אבל בעל לשון הרע שיושב ואומר כך עשה איש פלוני. א"א לא אלא קשה הראשון מן השני שהראשון הוא תליתאי והורג נפשות והשני תנין ואינו הורג אלא את עצמו. בינה זאת</p>
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In direct contrast to the Rambam, the Raavad argues that *Rechilus* is in fact more severe than *Lashon Hara*!! The reason for this, as he explains, is that causing animosity and ill-feelings amongst people has a far more wide-reaching destructive effect than simply speaking negatively about another. The Raavad is referring to the following Gemara:

Source 6. Erchin 16b

<p>In the West (Eretz Yisrael), they say: Third speech (i.e., <i>Rechilus</i>, when the middle 2nd-party – the speaker – facilitates the friction between the listener and the subject) kills three people. It kills the one who speaks malicious speech, and the one who accepts the malicious speech when he hears it, and the one about whom the malicious speech is said. The subject and the listener will come to blows on each other, and the vengeful families of both with extract revenge on the speaker who facilitated the entire process.</p>	<p>במערבא אמרי לשון תליתאי זה לשון הרכיל שהיא שלישיית בין אדם להבירו לגלות לו סוד קטיל תליתאי הורג למספרו ולמקבלו ולאומרו לרכיל עצמו שמתוך מריבה שנופלת בין השנים הורגין זה את זה והורגין גואלי הדם את הרכיל שההרג בא על ידו</p>
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Rechilus destroys worlds: it causes strife, it can cause someone to lose their job or prospective partner and can even lead to violence and death!

Lashon Hara, on the other hand, has nothing to do with causing strife; it need only affect the speaker himself.

In lieu of this Gemara, the Raavad’s attack on the Rambam appears to be quite justified: seemingly, *Rechilus* has a far greater destructive effect than does *Lashon Hara*. Given that this is true...

Question:
What does the Rambam mean; how can the Rambam maintain that *Lashon Hara* is a “much greater sin” than *Rechilus*?!?³

What do you think??

³ כבר עמדו על זה הגדולי האחרונים על הרמב"ם, עיין בכסף משנה שדחה דלפי הרמב"ם הגמ' בערכין אינו מיירי ברכילות אלא בלשון הרע, ודלא כפרש"י התם, וכבר תמהו עליו שאר אחרונים...

We'll have to explain that although, as the Raavad argues, *Rechilus* is indeed more destructive than *Lashon Hara* in a certain respect, however, in *another* respect *Lashon Hara* is in fact *more* severe.⁴ Let's explain:

The classic "Shaarei Teshuva", written by Rabbeinu Yonah from Grondi in the 13th century – which serves as one of the most authoritative sources for many of the halachos of *Lashon Hara* brought throughout the sefer "Chofetz Chaim" – writes as follows regarding the harmful effects of speaking negatively of others:

Source 7. Rabbeinu Yona, Shaarei Teshuva 3:216

<p>216. One who speaks <i>Lashon Hara</i> – There are two (negative) effects of this: firstly, the harm and humiliation which he causes to his fellow, and; secondly, his mere decision to find guilt in and vilify his fellow, as well as his joy in the others demise.</p>	<p>רשז. והמספר לשון הרע. שתים הנה קוראותיו. הנזק והבושת אשר יגרום לחבירו, ובחירתו לחייב ולהרשיע את חבריו ושמחתו לאידם.</p>
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The Rabbeinu Yonah establishes that there are 2 destructive qualities to speaking Lashon Hara:

1. The effect it has upon **others**, *and*;
 2. The effect it has upon **oneself**.
- ➔ As far as the harm that *Lashon Hara* has upon **others** is concerned, this may include any form of loss of employment, loss of social-status, loss of dating opportunities, etc..., or even the mere personal humiliation which the other feels as a result of the slanderous speech.
 - ➔ As far as the harm that *Lashon Hara* has upon **the speaker himself** is concerned, this includes his mere decision to vilify his fellow, or his rejoicing in another's demise; it degrades the speaker himself to view others in a negative light.

This 2nd element of *Lashon Hara* is the key to understanding the Rambam.

In so far as the effect on others in concerned, the Raavad is correct: *Rechilus* is indeed more severe than *Lashon Hara*; causing animosity between people by way of slanderous speech has a far more destructive external effect than merely speaking negatively of another, which harms only the speaker himself.

However, in another, and perhaps more fundamental respect, *Lashon Hara* is more detrimental than *Rechilus*: not in regards to the effect that it has upon another, but, rather, the self-destructive internal effect it has upon the speaker himself – *it engrains within the speaker a corrupt character-trait of viewing others negatively and rejoicing in others misfortune*. Therefore,

⁴ כן הסביר החכם ר' יצחק ערמאה נר"ו המובא בספר הליקוטים וז"ל ומצאתי בכתבי יד כתוב בלשון הזה החכם הרב יצחק ערמאה נר"ו אמר דקאי הראב"ד ז"ל איש עון גדול מזה דכתב הרמב"ם... ולהתיר הקושיא לפי דעת הרמב"ם ז"ל השיב דהראב"ד ז"ל לא הבין כונת הרמב"ם ז"ל דגם הרמב"ם ז"ל ס"ל דדוקא רכילות הורג ג' ולא לשון הרע וכונת הרמב"ם ז"ל היא לומר דאע"פ דאינו הורג אלא את עצמו עם כל זה הוא עון גדול מרכילות דהוי כאלו כופר בעיקר ועבד ע"ז ודברים אחרים, ומ"ש לקמן ג' לשון הרע הורגת לישנא קלילא נקט ואין כונתו ללשון הרע ממש אלא לדבר רע כמו רכילות עכ"ל

Answer:

Lashon Hara is indeed much more severe than *Rechilus*, in so far as the corrupt character-trait which is engrained in the speaker as a result of his negative speech and attitude on life.

Therefore, as the Rambam writes, if the Torah prohibits *Rechilus*, then all the more so is *Lashon Hara* prohibited as well!

Tying it all Together

| This fits like a glove with that which we explained earlier in Section 1: the Torah is not telling us
| simply not to **do** X, Y, or Z, as it usually does by other Mitzvoths. Rather, it's describing to us a type
| of lifestyle – *a description of character of whom not to become*. Now, if the Torah explicitly forbids
| one to use his faculty of speech to become a person who causes strife amongst those around him,
| (i.e. *Rechilus*), then it goes without saying that one should not use this power of speech to become
| the type of person who views others in a negative light (i.e. *Lashon Hara*)!!

3 – Other Practical Ramifications

This novel concept (“חידוש”) of the Rabbeinu Yonah has several additional ramifications which are well worth noting:

(1) No Damage to the Subject

Source 8. Chofetz Chaim [ג' ס"ו]

<p>Understand the following: even if, in regards to the subject, no bad will come about as a result of the negative speech (for example, if the listener does not accept the words, etc.), even still this is considered <i>Loshon Hara</i>, and requires atonement. Moreover, even if the speaker assesses from the onset that absolutely no harm will come about by way of his words, even still it is forbidden for him to speak derogatorily of another.</p>	<p>וְדַע, דְּאִפְלוּ אִם לֹא בָּא עַל יְדֵי הַלְשׁוֹן הַרְעָה שְׁלוֹ שׂוּם רְעָה לְהַאִישׁ הַהוּא, פְּגוֹן, שְׁלֹא קִבְּלוּ הַשׁוֹמְעִין אֶת דְּבָרָיו, וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּזֶה, אִף עַל פִּי כֵן מִכָּל לְשׁוֹן הַרְעָה לֹא נִפְקָא } לֹא יֵצֵא, וְצָרִיךְ כְּפָרָה. וְיוֹתֵר מְזִיד, דְּאִפְלוּ (ז) אִם הוּא מְשַׁעֵר לְכַתְחֻלָּה, שְׁלֹא יָבוֹא לְנִדּוֹן שׂוּם רְעָה עַל יְדֵי דְבוּרוֹ, אִף עַל פִּי כֵן אֲסוּר לוֹ לְסַפֵּר בְּגִנּוּתוֹ.</p>
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The Chofetz Chaim rules unequivocally that even if no harm will come about to the subject of the *Loshon Hara*, it is nevertheless prohibited. Why? The source for this, which the Chofetz Chaim brings, is no less than our very Rabbeinu Yonah!!

Source 9. Be'er Mayim Chaim #7

<p>This halacha (that <i>Loshon Hara</i> is prohibited even if no harm is caused to the subject) is also explicit in the Shaarei Teshuva, section 216, as stated: “One who speaks <i>lashon hara</i> causes two results: firstly, the damage and embarrassment which he afflicts upon his fellow, and; secondly, his mere decision to incriminate his fellow as well as his rejoicing in the others demise.” Now, in our matter that we are speaking about, <u>at least the second of these two negative components of the Rabbeinu Yonah is present.</u> ...From all of this we can extrapolate that derogatory speech about ones fellow, even though the subject will not be damaged whatsoever, is nevertheless entirely forbidden.</p>	<p>וְכֵן מוֹכַח מְשַׁעְרֵי תְשׁוּבָה בְּמֵאֵמֶר רַט"ז וְזֶה לְשׁוֹן הַרְעָה שְׁתֵּים הֵנָּה קוֹרְאוֹתָיו הַנֶּזֶק וְהַבְּשָׁת אֲשֶׁר יִגְרוֹם לְחִבְרֵי, וּבַחֲרִיתוֹ לְחַיִּיב וְלִהְרַשִּׁיעַ אֶת חֲבִירוֹ וּשְׂמִחָתוֹ לְאִידָם, וּבַעֲנִינֵינוּ דְאִירִינָן עַל כָּל פְּנִים עֲנִין רַע א' מֵהַנ"ל נִמְצָא בּוֹ... מִכָּל זֶה נִלְמוּד שְׁסִיפּוֹר דְּבַר גְּנוּת עַל חֲבִירוֹ אִף אִם לֹא יִזִּיקוּ כָּלל בְּזֶה, מִכָּלל עוֹן לֹא נִפְקָא.</p>
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Even in a situation where one’s derogatory speech causes no negative impact on the subject *even still* it is forbidden given that the 2nd component of the prohibition of *Lashon Hara* still exists – not the harm that it causes to someone else (ie the subject), but, rather, the harm that it causes to *oneself* (ie the *speaker*)!

(2) Inanimate Objects

Source 10. Chofetz Chaim 5:7

And know that just as it is forbidden to slander one's friend, so is it forbidden to slander his possessions [see Rabbeinu Eliezer Mimitz in sefer Yere'im]. And it is quite common, in our many sins, that one shopkeeper slanders the wares of another (and similarly, in other instances of the same kind), out of envy. And this is absolute Lashon Hara according to the Torah.	וְדַע דְּכַשְׁמֵי שְׁאֲסוּר לְהוֹצִיא דְּבָה עַל חֵבְרוֹ כֵּן עַל חֲפְצָיו אֲסוּר לְהוֹצִיא דְּבָה {רַבְנוּ אֱלִיעֶזֶר מְמִיץ בְּסֵפֶר יִרְאִים}. וְזֶה מְצוּי מְאֹד, בְּעוֹבוֹתֵינוּ הַרְבִּים, שֶׁחֲנֻנֵי אֶחָד מוֹצִיא דְּבָה עַל נֶכְסֵי חֲנֻנֵי אֲחֵר וְכֹל כֵּהָא גִּוְנָא מִפְּנֵי הַקְּנָאָה, וְזוֹ הִיא לְשׁוֹן הָרַע גְּמוּרָה מְדֹאֲרֵיתָא.
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The prohibition of *Lashon Hara* includes even to speak derogatorily of another's possessions! Why?

The source for this is the R' Eliezer from Mitz (1115-1175):

Source 11. "Sefer Yereim" #191

And even regarding another's assets and possessions, so too it is prohibited to speak derogatorily. For example, if one wishes to give a gift to his fellow, and another comes and denigrates the gift. The source for this is that which Chazal say [Erchin 16a]: "the fate of our forefathers was not sealed until they spoke negatively about the land (i.e. Eretz Yisroel)"	וּאֲפִילוֹ עַל עֲסָקֵי חֵבְרוֹ וּמְמוֹנוֹ אֲסוּר לְהוֹצִיא דְּבָה כְּגוֹן שְׂרוּצָה לְתַת מַתְנָה לְחֵבְרוֹ וּבֵא אֲחֵר וְגִינָה אוֹתוֹ עַל שֶׁקֶר וּנְמִצָּא מוֹצִיא דְּבָה. כְּדֹאֲמַרִּין בְּעֵרְכִין פ' י"ש בְּעֵרְכִין לְהַקֵּל (ט"ו 'א) לֹא נַחֲתָם גְּזֵר דִּינָם שֶׁל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲלֵא בְּשִׁבִיל שֶׁהוֹצִיאוּ דְּבָה עַל הָאָרֶץ.
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As a result of the spy's who went in the land of Israel and returned with a negative report about the land, the entire Jewish nation of that generation was prohibited from entering the Holy Land! Why? Because of *Lashon Hara*...about the sticks and stones of Eretz Yisroel!! According to the Rabbeinu Yonah, once again, this is well understood: although speaking negatively about inanimate objects causes no damage to anyone else⁵, it does, however, damage the speaker! This phenomenon is encapsulated in a poignant manner by a classic fable from the Chovos HaLevavos:

Source 12. Chovos HaLevavos [שער הכניעה פ"ו]

And it is said of a pious man who passed by an extremely foul-smelling carcass of a dog. His disciples said to him: "how foul-smelling is this carcass!". He answered them "how white are its teeth!" Eventually, they regretted having spoken disparagingly about the carcass. If it is improper to speak disparagingly of a dead dog, all the more so for a living human being. Now, if it is proper to praise the carcass of a dead dog for the whiteness of its teeth, how much more so, according to this, is it a duty to praise a human being, who is endowed with intelligence and understanding. His intent was to rebuke them, <u>to not habituate their tongues to speak badly, as this will enter their nature.</u>	וּנְאֻמָּר עַל אֶחָד מִן הַחֲסִידִים שֶׁעָבַר עַל נְבֵלַת כֹּלֵב מִסְרַחַת מְאֹד וְאָמְרוּ לוֹ תְּלַמִּידָיו כִּמָּה מִסְרַחַת נְבֵלָה זֹאת אָמַר לָהֶם כִּמָּה לְבָנִים שְׁנִיָּה וּנְתַחַרְטוּ עַל מָה שֶׁסִּפְרוּ בַּגְּנוּתָהּ וְכִיוֹן שֶׁהוּא גִּנְאֵי לְסַפֵּר בַּגְּנוּת כֹּלֵב מִתְּכִיּוֹן בְּאָדָם חַי וְכִיוֹן שֶׁהוּא טוֹב לְשַׁבַּח נְבֵלַת כֹּלֵב בְּלֹבֵן שְׁנִיָּה כִּי שֶׁהוּא חוֹבֵה לְפִי זֶה לְשַׁבַּח אָדָם מִשְׁכִּיל וּמְבִין וְהִיתָה כּוֹוֹנָתוֹ לְהוֹכִיחַם שֶׁלֹּא יִלְמְדוּ לְשׁוֹנָם לְדַבֵּר רַע וְיָשׁוּב לָהֶם טָבַע
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⁵ Although defaming another's possessions *could* also certainly cause them damage, for example if by doing so their business is diminished in any capacity, the point here is that the source for the Chofetz Chaim's halacha, from the Sefer Yereyim, is from the spy's, where there was no damage to the subject.

(3) A Certified Gossiper

There is a concept used throughout Torah literature called a “*Ba'al Lashon Hara*” – one who is a habitual speaker of negative attributes of others (literally, “Master”, like “Master of the house” – “בעל הבית”):

Source 13. Chofetz Chaim 1:3

<p>All this, only if one spoke negatively of his friend by chance. But if, G-d forbid, he is habituated to this sin, like those who customarily sit and say: "Thus and thus did so and so do," "Thus and thus did his fathers do," "This and this did I hear about him" — men such as these are called by Chazal "masters of <i>lashon hara</i>," and their punishment is far greater [than that of the former]. For in their perverseness of spirit and their malice of heart they transgress the Torah of Hashem, and it becomes <i>hefker</i> to them, as explained above in the end of the introduction. And about them it is said in the verse (Psalms 12:4): "Let Hashem cut off all smooth-talking lips, the tongue that speaks haughtily."</p>	<p>כָּל זֶה, אֶפְלוּ אִם רַק בְּמִקְרָה סִפֵּר גְּנוּת חֲבֵרוֹ, אָבֵל אִם, חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם, הִרְגֵּל בְּעוֹן זֶה בְּתַמִּידוּת, כְּמוֹ אֵלּוּ שְׂרָגִילִין תְּמִיד לִישָׁב וּלְסַפֵּר: כִּי וְכִי מַעֲשֵׂה פְלוֹנִי, כִּי וְכִי עָשׂוּ אֲבוֹתַי, כִּי וְכִי שְׁמַעְתִּי עָלָיו, וְהוּא דְבָרִים שֶׁל גְּנוּת, אֲנָשִׁים כְּאֵלּוּ הֵם נִקְרְאוּ בְּפִי חַז"ל בְּשֵׁם בְּעָלֵי לְשׁוֹן הָרַע וְעִנְשׁוֹ הַרְבֵּה יוֹתֵר גְּדוֹל, אַחֲרֵי שֶׁבִשְׂאֵט נִפְשָׁם וְזָדוֹן לָבָם עוֹבְרִין עַל תּוֹרַת ה', וְנִעְשֶׂה זֶה אֲצֵלָם כְּהִפְקָר, כְּמוֹ שְׂמֵבֶאֱר לְעֵיל בְּסוֹף הַפְּתִיחָה, וְעַלֵּיהֶם נֵאמַר בַּקְּבָלָה (תהלים יב:ד): "יִכָּרֵת ה' כָּל שִׁפְתֵי חִלְקוֹת לְשׁוֹן מְדַבֶּרֶת גְּדֻלוֹת"</p>
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It’s fascinating to note that this term – “*Baal Lashon Hara*” – is entirely unique to *Lashon Hara*; in regard to no other negative commandments do we refer to someone as a “master” of that particular sin.⁶ What is unique about *Lashon Hara* which earns it this special title?? Once again, the approach we have been discussing until now according to the Rabbeinu Yonah could explain for this unique phenomenon⁷:

- Regarding all other negative commandments, the prohibition is a description of action; what not to *do*.
- The prohibition of *Lashon Hara*, however, includes also a description of being/character; who not to *be*.

Therefore,

- ➔ By all other *aveiros*, one who habituates himself to do the *aveirah* has not categorically moved himself in to a new realm of that particular sin – he’s simply doing *more* (in **quantity**) of the same.
- ➔ By *Lashon Hara*, however, by habitually speaking negatively of others, one *becomes* (in **quality**) a different type of person, which is precisely the type of person that the Torah was explicitly warning against! He’s now categorically transformed himself into the type of person who views the world through a negative lens – he truly is a “*Ba'al Lashon Hara!*”

⁶ הגם שיש מושג של "בעל עברה" אבל זה נאמר רק באופן כללי ולא לגבי עברה פרטי כמו הכא בעניין לשון הרע.
⁷ כ"כ בספר קונטרס שמירת הלשון המובא ספר ח"ח מהדורת "דרשו" דף 143 הארה 13