

# *Slander vs. the Chamber of Secrecy*

PARSHA INSIGHTS - BEHAR BECHUKOSAI (5759)

## **SOME LOSHON HORA IS REALLY NASTY**

“If your brother becomes poor, and his means fail him when he is with you, then you shall uphold him, whether (he is a) convert or native born Jew, so that he can live with you” (25:35). *Rashi* clarifies: Do not allow the destitute individual to sink and fall. It might become too difficult to raise him up. Instead, we are supposed to provide financial help from the time his situation begins to deteriorate. This is indicated by the seemingly extra words in the *pasuk* [verse]: “...and his means fail him when he is with you, then you shall support him...” Once they BEGIN to fail, come to his rescue if at all possible. This is analogous to a burden on a donkey that is beginning to fall to the ground. While the load is still on the animal, even though it has begun to slip off, one person can grab hold of it and set it back in place. But once the load has fallen to the ground, even five people will not be able to return it to its place (*Toras Kohanim*).

What does this verse have to do with *shmiras haloshon* [guarding our speech], watching the way we speak? In positive commandment 4, the *Chofetz Chaim* connects it to causing someone a loss of livelihood through *loshon hora* [evil gossip]. By means of *loshon hora* or *rechilus* [hearsay] (telling Reuven what Shimon said about REUVEN - tale-bearing) a speaker might cause a victim to lose his source of financial support. Today’s *pasuk* obligates us to give financial aid to a fellow Jew to prevent his becoming poor. If the consequence of *loshon hora* is the loss of someone’s income or job, this positive commandment has been transgressed.

What are some examples? Let us say a person spreads vicious rumors that someone is not honest. Evil gossip can take another form as well - the speaker claims that a worker or craftsman is not qualified for the position he holds. Or, a congregant declares that the *rav* [rabbi] is incompetent or not as great a *talmid chacham* [wise scholar] as people think he is. These and similar violations of the laws of *loshon hora* can lead to catastrophe. The employee may end up losing his position for no justified reason.

We are commanded to support a person who has become impoverished, or better yet, to STOP him from losing his fortune. One can do this in many ways; monetary gifts or loans are excellent methods. Another possibility is to enter into a partnership in order to improve the person’s financial status, or to provide employment for him to prevent him from needing charity. This malicious slanderer is accomplishing the exact opposite! Since we are obligated to furnish others with *parnasa* [livelihood] whenever feasible, one who causes another to LOSE his livelihood clearly violates Hashem’s will. Whether he brings about this damage with evil words or any other method, a serious crime is being committed.

☞ **This is a fitting moment to summarize the main levels of giving *tzedaka* [charity].** We have been dealing with causing someone to lose his financial stability as the result of *loshon hora*, so let us explore the positive side - the proper methods of supporting other Jews. Based on a number of *Gemaros* and other statements of *Chazal* [our Sages], the *Rambam* outlines these *dinim* [laws] in the tenth chapter of the laws of gifts to the poor, beginning from section seven. Eight types of *tzedaka* are examined, starting from the highest measure.

1. Someone who upholds a Jew whose means of support have failed, in the following manner, achieves the greatest level of charity. We stated earlier that this can be done through a monetary present, loan, bringing him into a partnership, or providing him with a job. What makes this a superior type of *tzedaka*? The benefactor supports his neighbor SO THAT HE WILL NO LONGER NEED TZEDAKA. In other words, the most phenomenal monetary favor is to terminate the other person’s dependence on charity. It is greater than any other category, because in all the rest, the person will still have to come to others for sustenance. The *Rambam* cites our *pasuk* as the source for this type of *tzedaka*. It states: “You shall uphold him, whether he is a convert or native born Jew.” The “support” or “upholding” referred to is to stop him from being needy and dependent on others.

2. Level two is not quite as marvelous as the first one, but it is still an excellent method. One gives *tzedaka* to a poor person without knowing his identity, and the needy individual also does not know who the giver is. The *Rambam* explains that this is truly a “*mitzva lishma*” a *mitzvah* [good deed] done for pure intentions. The supporter can expect no recompense from the recipient. The *Lishkas Chasha'im* [Chamber of Secrecy] in the *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple] was like this. Righteous donors would place *tzedaka* there anonymously, and upstanding poor people would benefit without anyone knowing. Putting money into a charity container is close to this level, says the *Rambam*. Incidentally, he reminds us not to place *tzedaka* money into a charity box unless we know that the one in charge of collection is trustworthy, wise, and capable of managing the funds, like the great sage, Rabbi Chanania Ben Tradiyon.
3. The next level is when the giver knows the identity of the poor man, but the one receiving the money does not know from whom he is taking. Great *chachamim* [wise Torah scholars], for example, would go privately and throw money down at the doors of the needy. They were aware of who lived in these houses. The *Rambam* suggests this procedure if the trustees over *tzedaka* money cannot be depended upon to perform their tasks properly. In that case, it is better to take matters into our own hands to ensure that the charity reaches its destination.
4. Level four is when the destitute individual knows from whom he receives the money, but the giver has no idea to whom he is donating it. *Rambam* uses the following situation as an example. Some great sages would bind up coins in sheets and sling them over their backs. The poor would come and take them, but the givers would not see or know who was taking from them. In this way, the needy would not be ashamed. This, however, is not as commendable as number three. The reason is that the recipient DOES know who is giving it to him in this case.
5. A lower category of *tzedaka* is when someone approaches a poor person and puts money into his hand even before he asks for anything. The giver and taker see each other, so this is not as virtuous as the former levels. After all, there is an element of embarrassment. However, one who responds to a need before being asked deserves praise.
6. After this comes the case where the contributor gives after being asked. At least he is giving, but his deed does not compare to the former cases. Recall that the highest level was to support someone until he no longer needs charity - he is self-sufficient. The methods mentioned afterward provided *tzedaka* money, but not enough to stand the needy person on his own feet. But at least there was some degree of anonymity, or at least the donor did not need to be asked. In our situation, he only responds after a request is made.
7. Level number seven is giving charity, but not enough. The giver is capable of doing better. However, his action is done with a smile, a pleasant countenance. At least the poor person is not humiliated by a harsh tone on the part of the benefactor.
8. The eighth category is *tzedaka* given with negative emotions. It is still charity, but the quality of the *mitzvah* is greatly decreased by the manner in which it is done, an unfriendly, unpleasant demeanor.

We see that supporting a Jew is essential according to Torah law. We should strive for the highest levels of *tzedaka* all the time, as enumerated here by the *Rambam*. *Loshon hora* which causes loss of income is quite a serious offense. Let us remember this as we complete *Sefer Vayikra* [the Book of Leviticus]. *Chazak, chazak, vinischazaik* [Be strong, be strong, and we will be strengthened]!

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*

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