

Gossip/Slender

Some people believe that all talking about people who are not present is "gossip,". Others think saying bad things about people not present is "gossip." Or some think talking about things you don't know to be true about others is "gossip" and wrong. Gossip can be defined as idle talk or writing about another person or situation, regardless of fact. It can also be defined as, malicious or slanderous talk or writing about another person or situation with desire or intention to hurt them. It can also be defined as talk or writing about another person or situation in order to turn another's opinion against that person or situation. Gossip can be truth or falsehood, but it is still gossip. Talebearing can be defined as a negative story, a false report, or gossip. It can be defined as one who spitefully informs against another.

While there are many ways to be guilty of speaking improperly about other people, not everything that some would call "gossip" is wrong. We must let Scripture define what is wrong.

Hebrew is intensely aware of the power of speech and of the harm that can be done through speech. The universe itself was created through speech. Of the 43 sins enumerated in the Al Cheit (confession of sins is recited ten times on Yom Kippur, 11 are sins committed through speech. The Talmud tells that the tongue is an instrument so dangerous that it must be kept hidden from view, behind two protective walls (the mouth and teeth) to prevent its misuse.

The harm done by speech is even worse than the harm done by stealing or by cheating someone financially: money lost can be repaid, but the harm done by speech can never be repaired. For this reason, some sources indicate that there is no forgiveness for lashon ha-ra (disparaging speech). This illustrates the seriousness of improper speech. A Chasidic tale vividly illustrates the danger of improper speech: A man went about the community telling malicious lies about the rabbi. Later, he realized the wrong he had done, and began to feel remorse. He went to the rabbi and begged his forgiveness, saying he would do anything he could to make amends. The rabbi told the man, "Take a feather pillow, cut it open, and scatter the feathers to the winds." The man thought this was a strange request, but it was a simple enough task, and he did it gladly. When he returned to tell the rabbi that he had done it, the rabbi said, "Now, go and gather the feathers. Because you can no more make amends for the damage your words have done than you can recollect the feathers."

Speech has been compared to an arrow: once the words are released, like an arrow, they cannot be recalled, the harm they do cannot be stopped, and the harm they do cannot always be predicted, for words like arrows often go astray.

Exactly what constitutes improper speech about others? Understanding this is the most difficult part of the subject for most.

"Gossip" - "Rumor or talk of a personal, sensational, or intimate nature." This word is nowhere used in the KJV (it is used in the NKJV in 1 Timothy 5:13). Greek :phluaros: babbling

"Rumor" - "Unverified information of uncertain origin usually spread by word of mouth; hearsay."

"Slender" - "The utterance of defamatory statements injurious to the reputation or well-being of a person. ... A malicious statement or report."

"Backbite" - "To speak spitefully or slanderously about (a person)."

"Talebearer" - "A person who spreads malicious stories or gossip."

"Rail" - "To condemn or attack in bitter, harsh, or abusive language..."

"Revile" - "To denounce with abusive language."

lashan: to use the tongue, slander Lashon hara [is] scandal-mongering. Lashon ha-ra is considered to be prohibited by Scripture on the basis of **Leviticus 19:16**, “You shall not go up and down as a slanderer [in some translations: talebearer] among your people,” and is frequently condemned in the Book of Proverbs.

The rabbis of Judaism, in great hostility against it, often resorted to hyperbolic (exaggerated) language, e.g. in saying that slander, talebearing, and evil talk were worse than the three cardinal sins of murder, immorality, and idolatry. Of one who indulges in lashon say that he denies the existence of **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah) i.e.. (God), and that the Almighty declares “I and he cannot live in the same world” (Babylonian Talmud Arakhin 15b).

Rabbinic law distinguishes between various categories of talebearing (rekhlut), slandering, scandalmongering, etc. Every kind of trafficking in evil report or rumors—whether true or not—by carrying them from one person to another, or by relating unpleasant or harmful facts about another, is forbidden. The rabbis forbade even “the dust of lashon hara” [avak lashon hara], i.e., lashon haraby insinuation, as in saying “do not mention so-and-so for I do not wish to tell in what he was involved,” or in praising a person to his enemy since this also invites lashon hara.

Both the teller of and the listener to lashon hara are guilty of transgression, even if the person spoken about is present at the conversation. If a person publicizes unpleasant facts about himself, he who repeats them has not indulged in lashon hara.

Matthew 28:7,8 - An Malakym (angel) told the women to tell the apostles about **וְיֵשׁוּעַ** (Yahusha)'s resurrection. They were to speak to the apostles about someone who was not present.

Matthew 11:7-19 - **וְיֵשׁוּעַ** (Yahusha) told people how great John the Baptist was.

Acts 11:1-18 - Peter told believers in Jerusalem about the conversion of Cornelius.

In all these cases, someone spoke about people who were not present

We often do similar things and we know it is not wrong.

* We may tell good news about someone: they had a baby, got a job promotion, bought a new car.

* We may tell an interesting or humorous story about people not present, but the person involved may not object at all if he knew we told it.

* We sometimes make announcements in our assemblies and even pray to **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah) about people who are not present: someone who is out of town, sick, etc. These are people who are not present. Is it wrong to make announcements about them and pray about them?

Such speech is not wrong, because the person about whom we are speaking is not in any way harmed or injured. **Acts 9:39; Galatians 1:18-2:10; Luke 1:13-17; cf. 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:5-9**

Even telling unfavorable or uncomplimentary things about people not present is not necessarily sinful.

Again, inspired men often did this. Were they wrong?

Matthew 15:12-14 - After **וְיֵשׁוּעַ** (Yahusha) had finished rebuking the Pharisees, His disciples told Him that He had offended them. Though the Pharisees obviously were no longer present, **וְיֵשׁוּעַ** (Yahusha) proceeded to warn His disciples about the errors of the Pharisees.

Matthew 20:17-19 - **וְיֵשׁוּעַ** (Yahusha) took His disciples **aside** and told them that the chief priests and scribes would kill Him (obviously these men were not present).

Galatians 2:11-14 - Paul told believers in Galatia about a sin Peter had committed in Antioch.

In fact, Scripture writers often record events in which various people committed sins, even naming names and groups involved. We read about these sins even today, even though the people who committed the sins are obviously not present. Did these inspired men sin? Obviously not.

[**1 Timothy 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:16-18; 3:8; 4:10,14; Acts 4:27; Matthew 6:7; etc.**]

There are situations in which Scripture commands us to tell people about bad things other people have done.

Matthew 18:17 - If a believer sins and will not repent, we are commanded to tell the church. So under certain circumstances we **must** tell other people about a person's sin.

Just as **OWYAZ** (Yahusha) and His apostles and prophets often spoke about the sins of people, so we are required to oppose error and false teaching. In doing so, we may mention sins or false teaching people have committed, in order to warn other people to avoid those errors. This may not be wrong, and in some cases may be required.

Sometimes when people hear that this has happened, they claim wrong was done. They say we "gossiped" about those people. It is possible, of course, to speak wrongfully in such cases; but scripture examples show it is not necessarily sinful, and in many cases **YAZ** (Yahuah) requires us to do it.

So just because we have spoken about someone who is not present - even saying bad things about them - does not necessarily mean we have sinned. So what is sinful slander?

Some Characteristics of Sinful Slander

It is possible to slander someone when they are not present or even when they are present! Slander involves saying unfavorable things about a person in the following ways:

1. Some people accuse others of doing wrong when they do not know it to be true.

It is not necessarily wrong to sincerely ask someone about what they did, but it is slander to accuse someone without substantial evidence they are guilty.

Exodus 20:16 - You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

2 Timothy 3:3 - Paul lists a number of sins that characterize perilous times. The list of sins includes "slanderers", translated "false accusers" in the KJV.

Titus 2:3 - Aged women should be taught not to be "slanderers," again translated "false accusers" in the KJV.

The Greek definitions of the words "slander," "backbiting," "evil speaking," etc., show these include spreading false reports. **Romans 1:30; 2 Corinthians 12:20**

Examples: **Matthew 12:22-25; 11:18,19; 5:11; Acts 25:1,2; 24:2-9,13; 2 Samuel 10:1-3; Luke 23:2-5.**

What if we circulate a false report that someone else started? Can we blame them and remain free from guilt if it is false?

People often circulate rumors saying, "I don't know this is true, but I heard..."

Exodus 23:1 - You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. No matter who originates the accusation, we should not repeat and spread it unless we have substantial evidence it is true.

The fact that someone simply made an accusation is not enough. Anybody can make accusations. Lots

of innocent people, in scripture and since, have been falsely accused. We need to see the evidence.

What if I suspect a thing, but cannot really prove it?

1 Timothy 5:19 - Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. We must have evidence before we make accusations. If we do not have proof, maybe we need to ask questions and seek witnesses. But don't affirm guilt till the proof is in. This is jumping to conclusions without adequate proof about what a person did or why he did it. Often in a time of conflict, people circulate all kinds of rumors and motives for which they have no evidence. "I think he did it because..."

1 Timothy 6:4 – Verbal battles which promotes Envy, Strife, Slander, "Wicked/Evil suspicions".

Proverbs 24:28 - Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause. It is not always wrong to speak against someone, but there must be adequate cause first.

Matthew 18:16 -By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. The testimony of personal witnesses constitutes evidence to be evaluated.

Obviously, there are limits on our knowledge or what others have done. When it comes to Scripture, we have an infallible revelation. But when it comes to knowing what other people have said or done, sometimes even reliable sources may be sincerely mistaken. But a sincere mistake is significantly different from negligence, indifference, jumping to conclusions, or circulating unsubstantiated rumors. Before we definitely accuse others, we must put forth a reasonable effort to get the facts, not just suspicions.

If we don't have the facts, investigate first. Ask questions, gather testimony. But don't make charges till we have reasonable evidence.

Some make derogatory statements from malicious motives. We must sincerely seek to be sure our accusations are true. But even when we have the truth, that does not mean we are right in spreading the information. Some people think they can say anything about anyone as long as they feel sure it is true. But there is also the question of motive: there must be good reasons for telling bad things about others. Sometimes people spread stories because they want to hurt people's reputation.

1 Peter 2:1 - Evil speaking is associated with malice.

Psalm 41:5-7 - David's enemies spoke against him seeking to hurt him.

Malice or improper motives can take various forms as described in: **Ephesians 4:31; Romans 1:29,30; Colossians 3:8; 2 Cor. 12:20; Psalm 31:13; 15:3.**

* **Jealousy**

1 Peter 2:1 associates evil speaking with envy. We may do wrong by speaking evil of others because we envy their abilities or blessings or the honor or favor they have received. We may seek to exalt ourselves above them by making them look bad.

* **Vengeance, anger, hatred, or grudges.**

Jeremiah 20:10 - Jeremiah's enemies denounced and defamed him to take revenge.

1 Peter 3:9; 2:23 - We should not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling. **וַיִּשָׁלַח** (Yahuah) set the example in this. When He was reviled, He did not in turn revile others.

Vengeance is not just physical actions we take against others. One of the most common ways to take vengeance is by saying things to hurt others. Others harm us (or we imagine so), so we say defamatory things to "get even." Someone accuses us of something, so we respond, "Well, what about the time when you..."

Sin must be rebuked. But when we do so, we must be sure that we are motivated by concern for the sinner and others who may be involved, not by a desire for vengeance. **1 Corinthians 4:12,13; Ephesians 4:31**

* Self will

When others oppose our views, whether in personal matters or doctrinal issues, we may seek to get some "dirt" on them to discredit them and keep others from listening to them.

1 Timothy 6:4 - False teachers are often involved in "reviling." They hope to find fault in those who speak truth.

Jeremiah 6:28 - Rebels against **אֱלֹהִים** (Yahuah) go about as slanderers.

3 John 9,10 - I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. Diotrophes loved pre-eminence. One of his methods was to speak evil against the apostle John (note: "malicious words").

We see this technique again and again in politics. It is sometimes called the "scorched earth policy." When politicians oppose one another in an election or in some policy decision, often someone leaks some personal information about his opponents or their party to make them look bad. Often it happens shortly before an election.

Speaking evil against others so we can win a confrontation and get our way is a form of sinful slander. Yet it frequently happens in time of conflict.

* Persecution

Matthew 5:11 - We are Baruch (blessed) when people persecute us and say evil against us falsely.

Before we spread derogatory statements about someone, we need to make sure our motives are pure. Are we speaking for our own personal benefit, or are we sincerely speaking for the good of the one we criticize or for the good of others who really have a genuine need for the information? This requires serious self-examination, because it is easy to attribute bad motives to others and good motives to ourselves. **Psalm 31:18; 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16; 4:4**

Some simply enjoy meddling in the personal affairs of others, spreading dirt about others.

Some people just get a thrill from spreading derogatory stories about others. They feel important because they know some intimate personal affairs that other people do not know about someone, and especially if they know some "dirt" about somebody.

Some tabloid magazines, newspapers columns, and TV shows sell their product and make a living this way. They delight in digging up dirt, and become rich by spreading the dirt to people who delight in reading it.

1 Timothy 5:13 - Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

2 Thessalonians 3:11 - For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies and meddling in other people's business.

Leviticus 19:16 - You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am **אֱלֹהִים** (Yahuah).

Some people are idle, having nothing constructive to do. So they spread rumors about others. When others do wrong, instead of trying to help them, they enjoy talking about them to others.

Again, there are times when some information needs to be made known in order to help the one who

did wrong or to help other people who have a real reason to know the information. But we must be sure we speak for the good of others, not just because we enjoy being busybodies.

Some broadcast private sins instead of personally confronting the sinner.

Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3 - If our brother sins against us, we are to go tell him his fault between the two of us. If he repents (hears us) we have gained our brother. The matter is resolved. Note that "hearing" us in **Matthew 18** is defined in **Luke 17** to mean "repenting." Until the person repents and starts doing right, he has not "heard" us.

The sin is made known to others only if the brother refuses to correct his error when he has been personally confronted. To spread a personal matter before confronting the sinner may cause unnecessary harm to a brother's reputation, and it drags other people into a controversy unnecessarily. When the brother has been confronted and has refused to correct the wrong, however, then we must get others involved.

Sometimes such matters are handled improperly because of ignorance of **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah)'s plan. But often people report private sins to other people, before the sinner has been adequately confronted, because of improper motivations. The issue to be remembered is: Are we acting according to Scripture for the sincere purpose of helping others, or are we acting to hurt others?

Consider the words of your mouth; it is wrong to use your tongue for gossip or slander. Rather, use your mouth for good: talk with **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah), pray for others, and speak the Word.

As David, a man after **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah)'s own heart, prayed: **Psalms 19:14**-Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah), my rock and my redeemer. (our words reflect the meditation of our heart).

THE TONGUE IS A LITTLE MEMBER

Scripture tells us, So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! **6**And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by Sheol. **James 3:5-6**

TRAVELLING COMPANIONS OF GOSSIP

Scripture lists whisperers and backbiters (or those who gossip) along with those who are, **Romans 1:29-31**-They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah), insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, They are senseless, faithless, heartless, merciless.

2 Timothy 3:1-5- 1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah), 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. (turn away from false accusers or malicious gossips).

It is written, **Proverbs 6:16-19**- There are six things which **אֵלֹהִים** (Yahuah) hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. 20 My son, observe the commandment of your father

The one who gossips reveals the true nature of their heart. As it is written: **Matthew 12:34**-You brood

of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart—revealing that sin is in control).

It is written, **Proverbs 19:9**-A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish.

Proverbs 12:18-There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 12:22-Lying lips are an abomination to אַיָּהוָה (Yahuah), but those who act faithfully are his delight.

THREE CAUTIONS:

1) Do not associate with a person who is a gossip. As it is written, **Proverbs 20:19**-Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.

2) Conceal the matter; keep it to yourself.

As it is written, **Proverbs 11:13**-Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.

3) Let no unwholesome words proceed out of your mouth.

As it is written, **Ephesians 4:29**-Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Our words should promote healing and build up and edify the hearers. Words such as, "I love you, I am praying for you, I will stand by you."

Proverbs 20:19 He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.

Psalms 34:13 Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit.

Proverbs 11:13 He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.

Psalms 141:3 Set a guard, O אַיָּהוָה (Yahuah), over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

Titus 3:2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

Exodus 23:1 "You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

James 4:11 Do not speak against one another, brethren He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

Proverbs 26:20 For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.

James 1:26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

Psalm 101:5 Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure.

Leviticus 19:16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am **אֲנִי** (Yahuah).

Psalm 50:20 "You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son.

Psalm 41:5 My enemies speak evil against me, "When will he die, and his name perish?"

Exodus 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

John 7:12-13 There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, "He is a good man"; others were saying, "No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray." Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Hebrews.

Proverbs 10:19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 18:6-7 A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows. A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul.

Proverbs 21:23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.

Proverbs 17:9 He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Proverbs 25:9-10 Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the secret of another, Or he who hears it will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

Proverbs 10:18 He who conceals hatred has lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool.

Leviticus 19:16 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am **אֲנִי** (Yahuah).

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GOSSIP

- 1) Genuine repentance—ask for forgiveness
- 2) Commitment—seal on my lips—guard on my mouth (think before you speak)