

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

ACKNOWLEDGING THE GOOD (HAKARAT HATOV)

Giving Gifts

Acknowledging the good that other people do or have done for us applies to all people, Jewish and non-Jewish. You may give a gift to any person who has done something nice or good to you as acknowledgment of what they did for you in the past or in anticipation of what they might do for you in the future.

BEARING A GRUDGE

Do Not Bear a Grudge (Lo Titor)

You may not bear a grudge (*lo titor*).

EXAMPLE Someone did something not nice to you and some time later asks you for a favor. You may not make the person feel bad about what he or she did previously, even if you do grant the favor.

NOTE This applies to monetary issues and the custom is to apply it to non-monetary issues.

COUNTING PEOPLE

Counting Jews

Jews should not be counted by number individually, but they may be counted as groups. The prohibition is only verbally, out loud.

EXAMPLE

You should not say "There are 53 people here." You may say, "There are more than 50 people."

NOTE You may use a sentence, such as *Hoshiya et amecha* (counting each person as a word in the 10-word phrase).

DEROGATORY SPEECH (LASHON HARA)

Introduction to Lashon HaRa

Lashon ha'ra is saying (or communicating in any way--even by rolling your eyes, winking, etc.) anything derogatory or negative about someone that can hurt him or her in any way--by causing embarrassment, loss of money, lowered esteem, bad reputation, etc.

Lashon ha'ra in which you attribute the negative statement about the person to whom you are speaking to someone else is called *rechilut* (gossip).

Lashon ha'ra that is false is called motzi shem ra. Saying something that is true is not lashon ha'ra if it is being said for a positive purpose (even though the same words would be lashon ha'ra if they were only intended to hurt another person and had no positive purpose).

Lashon ha'ra, including *rechilut*, is forbidden to be said about shomer Shabbat Jews except for a positive purpose; motzi shem ra is forbidden to say about anyone--Jewish or not, shomer Shabbat or not, whether for a positive purpose or not.

Speaking Lashon HaRa

When You May Say Lashon HaRa

Lashon ha'ra, including *rechilut*, even if truthful, is not permitted except for a constructive or positive purpose. (Motzi shem ra is never permitted.) Its purpose cannot be to hurt a person. It is permitted and recommended to tell the facts about someone:

1. To protect others from being hurt (being cheated, molested, etc.), or
2. For a positive purpose that cannot be achieved through any other means.

Lashon HaRa To Protect Others from Being Hurt

You may say truthful lashon ha'ra (including *rechilut*, if it is necessary to divulge the name of the person who told you):

- To prevent a bad person from telling children bad things or to keep children from learning bad behavior from the bad person;
- To avoid being implicated in what the bad person is doing;
- To prevent other Jews' suffering a loss by using a worker who did bad work for you.

NOTE You may not say that X is a bad/inexperienced workman, even if that is the truth, unless the listener needs to know this to protect himself or herself.

- If a businessman cheats you or lies to you, you should warn other Jews about him (but only if you suspect they want to do business with him).
- If you know something bad about someone who a third person wants to date or marry, in many cases you are required to tell what you know (but this can be very complicated and dangerous and a rabbi should be consulted about what to do in many cases)!

When You May Add Facts to Correct Possible Lashon HaRa

If the reasons behind an action are not clear and someone may get the wrong/negative impression of someone in question, then you should tell the facts and tell the entire story.

EXAMPLE

Someone (A) insults another person (B) in public. Entire story is that B beat up A previously. Knowing the full story changes how people might view A.

NOTE If it is only your opinion, state that instead of declaring it as fact.

Lashon HaRa To Allow Gain

Saying lashon ha'ra for a positive purpose includes gain for yourself or for someone else; you may talk about others in cases such as these:

- **Psychotherapy** You may say truthful lashon ha'ra or *rechilut* to a psychotherapist since you don't know what is important. Outside of therapy and with non-therapists, you may say anything that will bring about a positive result (and only if there is no other way to achieve that result).

EXAMPLES

Abusive Parent

If a child needs to know what an abusive parent did or is doing in order to heal from damage, or if a therapist says it is necessary for the child to be told what the abusive parent did.

Abusive Spouse

If it will help the healing process for an abused spouse to talk about what he or she suffered.

- **Upset** If you are upset by what a person did to you and it will help you to calm down by telling what was done to you (that is, you will gain by feeling better).

NOTE If you want to ask someone for information that could be lashon ha'ra, you should say why you are asking so the other person will understand that it is for a positive purpose and is therefore not lashon ha'ra.

Lashon HaRa and Specific Cases

Children, Shomer Shabbat Person, Groups

Even truthful lashon ha'ra, including *rechilus*, may not be said about a Jewish child or a shomer Shabbat person or group of people unless for a positive purpose that cannot be achieved any other way.

- A parent should not rebuke or criticize a child if it will embarrass the child in front of others.
- A child (whether young or adult) may not correct a parent who is saying lashon ha'ra, unless the parent would want to be reminded that the parent is saying lashon ha'ra. Even then, it must be done respectfully.
- You may make statements about groups of people in general, even if negative, as long as the purpose is to protect other people from them. But what you say must be true.

NOTE It is not lashon ha'ra to talk truthfully about someone who cannot be identified. (You may say “someone,” but only if that person is not identifiable.)

Lashon HaRa: Public Knowledge

You may mention information that is public knowledge. But your intent should not be to spread the word, but rather just to pass along interesting information.

EXAMPLE

Saying, “Did you hear that the president of the synagogue just got convicted of...”

Lashon HaRa: Mass Media

You may read in the paper, see on TV, or hear on the radio an account of someone's bad behavior (since you cannot know whether it will affect you or be important for you to know until you read or hear the information, it may be OK; ask a rabbi). You may not accept it as being the complete truth, but you should be wary.

Lashon HaRa: Shomer Shabbat Public Figure

You may not tell or listen to lashon ha'ra about a public figure who is a shomer Shabbat Jew unless there is a purpose.

You may give your opinion about a shomer Shabbat politician as long as you state it as your opinion and as long as giving your opinion may help other people.

Lashon HaRa: Shomer Shabbat Organization

You may not say any of the three types of speaking ill about an organization, school, synagogue, etc., whose members or employees are shomer Shabbat--except for a positive purpose.

EXAMPLES

You may not say any of the three types of lashon ha'ra about a Jewish school's cost, bad teachers, etc., unless it may be relevant to future students (and even if it is relevant, you may still not say motzi shem ra).

You may not say, “I don't like that shul because there is lots of talking,” unless you think the person will appreciate knowing since he or she will not want to go to a shul with lots of talking.

Lashon HaRa: Asked for Opinion

If you are asked for your opinion, you may give it if it is relevant (has a useful purpose) to the person asking. Otherwise, no comment.

If you are asked your opinion about a Torah lecture or lecturer, you may give your opinion only AS your opinion, not as criticism.

Lashon HaRa: Told in Confidence

If you have been told something in confidence, even if you think it is best for the person who told you if you pass it along, you may still not re-tell anyone else. You may say, “I cannot speak about that” if you are asked. Consult a rabbi.

Lashon HaRa: Getting Back at Someone

If someone hurts you, you may get back at the person at the time of the action against you. But afterward, it would be revenge and is forbidden.

EXAMPLE

Someone tells you, “You are good for nothing.” You may say, “You are worse than I am,” if it makes you feel better.

Lashon HaRa: Bet Din Summons

If someone with whom you have a problem refuses a *hazmana* (summons) from a bet din, you may publicize a letter from the bet din saying the person refused the *hazmana* so that the recipient might agree to go to the bet din due to public embarrassment.

Lashon HaRa: Bet Din for Abuse

All matters between Jews should, ideally, initially go to bet din but only if the bet din is capable of resolving the problem. In cases of suspected child or spousal (or other) abuse, you may report it to the police if there is no bet din that is capable of dealing with the problem immediately: You are not required to wait while a bet din gets around to your case. The key is to expedite the case.

NOTE Some cities have special batei din for such matters.

NOTE Beware of governmental agencies that may take away children from their homes, even without evidence.

Listening to and Believing Lashon HaRa

Listening to and believing any category of lashon ha'ra is also forbidden. If you do hear something bad about someone else, do not believe that it is definitely true--but you may believe that it might be true. When you hear lashon ha'ra:

- You can try to change the subject, since pointing out that lashon ha'ra is being said may not stop it from being said.
- If you see a shomer Shabbat Jew doing something that seems to be forbidden, you should judge him/her favorably and assume that there is a good interpretation to what is being done.

EXAMPLE

SITUATION

You see someone who is not shomer mitzvot get in a car on Shabbat.

WHAT TO DO

Make the logical assumption that he/she is going to drive (and not for a *halachically* permissible purpose).

SITUATION

You see a shomer Shabbat person get in a car on Shabbat.

WHAT TO DO

Assume there is a good, *halachic* reason for it. However, you may not ignore reality or make implausible or unlikely excuses for bad behavior.

EVIL EYE (AYIN HARA)

When Ayin HaRa Is Significant

Ayin ha'ra is only significant if a person is worried about being affected.

HONORING THE ELDERLY

Standing for the Elderly

You do not need to stand up for old people (as a form of honoring them) unless the old person is over 70 years old and is shomer mitzvot. This applies to women, too, if they are 70 years old or more and are *shomrot Shabbat*.

HONORING PARENTS

INTRODUCTION TO HONORING PARENTS

Introduction to Honoring Parents

Honoring your father and mother—the fifth of the *Ten Commandments*—heads the *mishna's* list of mitzvot for which you receive reward in this world as well as in the next. It is one of only two mitzvot for which long life is promised (the other is shilu'ach ha'kein—shooing away a wild mother bird before taking her eggs). This mitzva especially refers to giving your parents food and drink as well as helping them get dressed, get covered, and go out and in. But it also includes:

- Not sitting in your father's chair.
- Not calling your parents by their first names.
- Not disagreeing with, not correcting, or not contradicting your parents if doing so will upset them.
- Agreeing with them by taking sides in an argument (doing so is considered disrespectful since they do not need your agreement).
- Not waking them up when they are sleeping--unless they would want you to do so.

Whatever applies to fathers also applies to mothers, such as not sitting in the parent's chair.

NOTE Many of these halachot may be overridden at the parent's request; for instance, you may correct your parent or call him or her by first name if he or she wants you to do so.

All parents—whether biological or adoptive, Jewish or non-Jewish—must be treated well, acknowledging the good they did for the child (hakarat ha'tov). If any parent opposes the observance of Jewish laws, the child should limit contact with the parent.

HONORING PARENTS: NAMES

Honoring Parents: Names: Saying Your Parents' Names

Children should not normally call their parents by name, nor say their parent's name without mentioning that this is their parent, as follows:

- When praying for your brother's recovery from illness (refu'a), say:
 - Your brother's name,
 - *Ben imi* (son of my mother) or *ben imi morati* (son of my mother, my teacher), and

- Your mother's name.
- When praying for your sister's recovery from illness, say:
 - Your sister's name,
 - *Bat imi* (daughter of my mother) or *bat imi morati* (daughter of my mother, my teacher), and
 - Your mother's name.
- An aliya for your brother, say:
 - Your brother's name,
 - *Ben avi* (son of my father) or *ben avi mori* (son of my father, my teacher), and
 - Your father's name.

HONORING PARENTS: ADOPTIVE

Adoptive Parents: Acknowledging the Good

Adoptive parents must be treated well by the adopted child, acknowledging the good they did for the child (*hakarat ha'tov*). But they are not considered *halachic* parents and the child may not be required to give them the honor that is required by the Torah for natural parents.

HONORING PARENTS: NON-JEWISH

Respect for Non-Jewish Parent

Treat a non-Jewish parent who does not interfere with the Jewish observance of his or her Jewish child with more respect than any other person, even though the specific laws of honoring a Jewish parent do not apply.

HONORING PARENTS: NON-OBSERVANT JEWISH

Shabbat/Jewish Festivals with a Non-Observant Jewish Parent

You should spend Shabbat or Jewish festivals with your non-religious Jewish parent (even in a non-religious environment) if he or she wants you to, as long as you can still observe all of the Shabbat or Jewish festival laws AND if your parent needs your help.

NOTE You do not need to stay with your parent if your parent does not need your help or if you will not be able to fulfill all of the requirements of Shabbat or the Jewish festival.

HONORING PARENTS: ABUSIVE JEWISH

Honor an Abusive Jewish Parent but Not Suffer

A child is not required to suffer from any type of abuse (not physical, emotional, psychological...) from a parent, but the child should honor his or her Jewish parents as much as possible without suffering.

NOTE Consult a rabbi to define individual cases of abuse by parents because the issues are complex.

HONORING TORAH SCHOLARS

WHO IS A TORAH SCHOLAR

Who Is a Torah Scholar

Who is a Torah scholar? It depends on location and era. Someone with minimal Jewish knowledge may be considered a scholar if no one else knows as much.

MAIN TORAH TEACHER (RAV MUVHAK)

Who Is Main Torah Teacher (Rav Muvhak)

It is theoretically possible--but highly unlikely--to have one main teacher (rav muvhak) who taught you most of your Torah knowledge. However, a rav muvhak might exist for a person who was not brought up religiously observant and did not have a traditional Jewish education.

Correcting a Rav Muvhak

Although a rav muvhak is deserving of the same honor you would give your parents, you may correct him if he wants you to correct him, just as you may correct a parent who wants you to do so.

TORAH SCHOLAR HONORING OTHER TORAH SCHOLARS

Torah Scholar Honoring Other Torah Scholars

A Torah scholar should stand up for another Torah scholar who is greater in knowledge; a greater Torah scholar should acknowledge the lesser scholar by standing up a little bit.

HOSTING GUESTS (HACHNASAT ORCHIM)

To Whom To Give Food and Lodging

We are commanded to give food and accommodation (hachnasat orchim) to people who do not have food to eat or a place to sleep. This applies to any day, not just to Shabbat and Jewish festivals.

Inviting Friends for Meals

Inviting friends to your house for meals, even on Shabbat and Jewish festivals, is not hachnasat orchim--unless the friends do not have food or a place to sleep. But inviting friends for meals may qualify as other mitzvot.

Accompanying a Guest

You should walk a guest to the door or even along his/her way when he/she leaves your home. This is an act of kindness (chesed).

HURTING PEOPLE

Hurting People

You are forbidden from hurting another person physically, emotionally, or psychologically.

KINDNESS (CHESED)

What Are Acts of Kindness

We are commanded to do acts of kindness (chesed), which means helping someone by doing an action that that person cannot do (or has difficulty doing) for him/herself.

EXAMPLE

- Visiting sick people;
- Opening a window for a crippled or weak person;
- Giving charity;
- Teaching non-religious Jews about Judaism;
- Finding marriage partners for single people.

MEMBERS OF THE OTHER GENDER

CONTACT (NEGIA)

What Constitutes Negia

Unrelated people of one gender may not generally have intimate physical contact with members of the opposite gender (*negia*). The prohibited types of contact are any that express affection or promote interpersonal relationships or intimacy. *Negia* does not apply to:

For Males--mother, grandmothers, daughters, granddaughters, and other descendants and antecedents.

For Females--father, grandfathers, sons, grandsons, and other descendants and antecedents.

Non-Intimate Contact between Men and Women

Non-intimate contact is permissible between men and women--even if the two people are related or have a close personal relationship (except a husband and wife when she is a *nida*).

EXAMPLES

- Doctor and patient.
- Massage therapist and patient.
- Lifeguard and swimmer.
- A Jewish *man* may catch a Jewish girl or woman on the flying trapeze.

REASON This is not intimate contact.

INTER-MARRIAGE

Family Member Who Inter-marries

Treat as single a sibling or parent or any other Jew who marries a non-Jew, as he or she is not considered to be married.

EXAMPLE If they visit, don't let them share a bedroom.

MISREPRESENTING YOURSELF (GNEIVAT DA'AT)

When Misrepresenting Yourself (Gneivat Da'at) Applies

It is forbidden to give a falsely positive impression to other people (*gneivat da'at*), whether to Jews or non-Jews. Pretentiousness is a type of *gneivat da'at*.

Gneivat da'at may be through actions or speech and requires intent. It applies only when someone else will be affected.

REBUKING (TOCHACHA)

When To Rebuke (Tochacha)

You must tell another Jew--but only if he or she will appreciate your comment—if he or she:

- Is violating a Jewish law, or
- Has done a hurtful action.

REVENGE (NEKAMA)

You May Not Take Revenge

You may not take revenge on someone.

EXAMPLE You ask for a favor--to borrow an item or for help--and you get refused. Later, if that person asks to borrow something of yours or for help, you may not refuse, saying "No,

because you did not lend to me (or help me) when I asked.”

NOTE

Revenge applies to loaning money but also deals with other cases.

TZNI'UT

INTRODUCTION TO TZNI'UT

Introduction to Tzni'ut

Tzni'ut, or modesty, is the concept of not standing out--commonly applied to attire, behavior, or speech--and includes privacy and separation of genders. Jews should not exhibit their bodies--but they should also not speak unnecessarily loudly, be boastful, or do anything that attracts attention to themselves. Tzni'ut applies between people and other people and also between people and God.

For tzni'ut in attire, see [ATTIRE](#).

VISITING THE SICK (BIKUR CHOLIM)

Why Visit the Sick

The main commandment of visiting sick people is chesed (kindness):

- To see if they need anything, and
- To pray for their recovery.

WASTING PEOPLE'S TIME (TIRCHA TZIBUR)

Wasting People's Time (Tircha d'tzibura)

You may not waste people's time or upset them (tircha d'tzibura).

EXAMPLE A prayer leader should not:

- Roll a Torah scroll during the minyan in order to get to the correct place for reading (it should have been done previously) unless necessary;
- Roll up his tefilin after taking them off for musaf on Rosh Chodesh, before hallel on chol ha'moed of Sukkot, or after hallel on chol ha'moed Passover. (Instead, he should take them off and leave them on the bima until the prayer service is finished, or roll them up during Torah reading).

WIDOWS, ORPHANS, POOR

Oppressing Widows, Orphans, Poor

There is a special Torah prohibition against antagonizing widows, orphans, and poor people.

- **Widow** You may not antagonize a widow even if she is rich and even once she remarries.
- **Orphan** An orphan only gets special treatment until he/she can fend for himself/herself.

NOTE An orphan is usually someone:

- Without parental support,
- Who cannot fend for himself either financially or otherwise, and
- Is usually under 18 years old.

WITNESSES

WITNESSES: WHO MAY TESTIFY IN JEWISH COURT

Witnesses: Non-Observant Jew in Jewish Court

A Jew known not to observe the laws of Shabbat is not accepted as a witness under Jewish law. However, if it is known that the person would not lie, he or she may be trusted in some cases.

Witnesses: Women in Jewish Courts

It is customary today for Jewish courts to accept the testimony of Jewish women.

Witnesses: Non-Jews in Jewish Courts

It is customary today for Jewish courts to accept non-Jews of both genders as witnesses in some circumstances.

Witnesses: Relatives in Jewish Courts

These relatives of participants in a Jewish court case or wedding may not be witnesses:

- Parents and their spouses
- Children and their spouses
- Siblings and their spouses
- First cousins and their spouses.

However, it is customary today for Jewish courts to accept relatives as witnesses in some cases.

YICHUD

When Yichud Applies

The general rule for yichud is that a man and a woman who is not his wife or a woman and man who is not her husband may not be secluded together. If another adult can enter the room at any time without knocking, there is no problem with yichud, even if the adult is not present initially. Yichud does not apply whenever:

- A woman has a lockable door that only she controls, which is locked (in this case, men are permitted elsewhere in the building).
- Direct descendants or ancestors are in a room together (in this case, all other men/women combinations are permitted--even if the other people are not related).
- Three (or more) women and one man (or more) are in a room, except when they will be sleeping. At those times, four (or more) women and one man (or more) are permitted in a room or enclosed area.
- Two (or more) men and one (or more) woman/women are in a room.
- Other people have keys to the room and may enter at any time.
- One (married) woman is with one or more men and the woman's husband is in the same area (RMH looks at the local business district as the "area," so wherever businesses would be advertising or marketing would be a local area).
- For other cases, consult a rabbi.

Father and Daughter Sleeping in Same Room

It is OK for a father and a daughter to sleep in same room.