

Lashon Hara: The Evil Tongue

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How do we keep from practicing malicious gossip in the Body of Messiah?

A very prominent problem in the Church and Messianic congregations is the issue of what Judaism calls Lashon Hara or the Evil Tongue. Lashon Hara is defined as gossip, slander, murmuring, lying, etc. Judaism has a whole system in place to deal with this problem and essentially it boils down to this: **if you don't have something nice to say about someone then don't say it at all!** And this includes even thinking about it.

The problem within our congregations today is that we think that we are being righteous when we share what we perceive to be wrong about someone else. But this is what is at the heart of the problem. It is our perceptions that cause us to commit Lashon Hara, all in the name of the Kingdom of Yahweh. We would be better off minding our own business and reflecting on our own actions and words than worrying about everyone else.

So with that in mind, let us take a look at what Scripture has to say about the subject of Lashon Hara.

We are going to start out with first sharing what Scripture has to say about forgiveness and resolving disputes. So you might say that we are putting the cart before the horse but what our intention is, is to show how we are supposed to treat one another and then we will proceed on and show what Scripture has to say about that part of our body called the tongue.

Matthew 18:21-22: *Then Kefa called to Him, and said, "My Master, how many times will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?" And Yeshua said to him, "I say not to you, until seven times, but until seventy times seven."*

Now with that in mind let us take a look at the proper Biblical procedure for resolving disputes.

Matthew 18:15-17: *And if your brother sins against you, go and reprove him between you and him alone, and if he will hear you, you have won your brother. But if he will not hear you, take to yourself one witness or two, that **at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established**[Deuteronomy 19:15]. And if he will not hear them, speak to him in the assembly, but if he neglects to hear in the assembly, let him be to you as a heathen or a transgressor.*

This is the basis for forgiving one another and how to go about resolving disputes with brethren. Nowhere do we see any instruction about sharing our problems with others **before** we first attempt to resolve our problem with our brother. And nowhere do we

see instruction allowing us to share gossip about anyone who we are having a problem with.

Rather than going behind someone's back and discussing them with someone not directly involved in the situation we would be better serving Yahweh by going one on one straight to our brother. One of the hardest things to do is to withdraw our words once they have gone out from our lips.

Job 27:3-4: *But as long as my soul is within me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak iniquity and my tongue shall not utter deceit.*

3956 לשון lashown {law-shone'} or לשון lashon {law-shone'}
tongue (of men), tongue (literal), tongue (organ of speech), language, tongue (of animals), tongue (of fire)

These words come straight from the mouth of Job. We would encourage you to think about that because of the situations that Job was put through. If after what he had gone through he could still utter the words that he would not speak evil or utter lies then we had better reflect on what we are saying and doing in the Name of Yahweh because we cannot justify Lashon Hara when Job would not lower himself to doing that.

Psalms 5:10: *For there is no sincerity in the mouth of any of them, their inner [thought] is treacherous; their throat an open grave, their tongue is glib.*

This is pretty intense here in what David, the writer of this Psalm, is saying. There is no truth coming from their mouths and their innermost thoughts are treacherous and their throats from which comes forth their words are compared to an open grave. The words being spoken here give us a very clear idea of exactly how Yahweh views our words, especially those that come forth as slander or gossip.

And yet we know that many will read what we are writing here and say that this does not apply to them. All they are doing is sharing what they have heard themselves, but we say, this is the problem. Whether they have heard it firsthand for themselves or if they have heard second- or third-hand, it should never have been repeated except in the context of what we are shown in Matthew. Anything other than that is a violation of Scripture as shown us by Yahweh. That is the bottom line, plain and simple!

Psalms 10:7: *His mouth is filled with [false] oaths, with deception and malice; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.*

Psalms 15:1-5: *A Psalm by David. Yahweh, who may sojourn in Your Tent? Who may dwell on Your Holy Mountain? 2 One who walks in perfect innocence, and does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart; 3 who has no slander on his tongue, who has done his fellow no evil, nor cast disgrace upon his close one; 4 in whose eyes a contemptible person is repulsive, but who honors those who fear Yahweh; who can swear to his detriment without retracting; 5 who lends not his money on interest; and takes not a bribe against the innocent. The doer of these shall not falter forever.*

When you look at the two passages from Psalms, do you see which individual Yahweh honors and who it is that He says will dwell on His Holy Mountain? The one whose lips are clean! Do you realize just how seriously Yahweh takes the sin of slander? This is not just the act of speaking ill of someone but this involves gossip, things that you have heard that

sound true but have not been verified and yet they are passed on to others. We need to be very careful about what comes out of our mouths. Remember that our mouths have been compared to the grave.

It is so much more difficult to take back what we have said in anger or hurt than it is to keep our mouths shut in the first place. No matter how truthful or right we may think we are, the old adage is true: **Think before you speak!**

Psalm 34:14: *Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.*

Psalm 39:2: *I said, "I will guard my ways from sinning with my tongue, I will guard my mouth with a muzzle, even while the wicked one stands before me."*

A very interesting choice of words here in that David says that he will guard his mouth with a muzzle if necessary. Sometimes I feel like that, but it's usually *after* I have spoken, when it should have been *before*.

The words that come from our tongues can bring us to sin. Usually we say what we are thinking and yet we may not intend it to be so. So what does this mean for us? That we must learn to train our thoughts as well as our tongues.

I have a sarcastic way about me and I say things that I should not at times. My entire family was like this so I could claim that it's in my genes, but that really would be no excuse. It can, however, serve as an explanation of my actions. I have been striving most of my adult life to tame my tongue and most of the time have failed miserably at it. I have made a concerted effort over the past two years to do better. With the help of my wife and family and congregation I am doing better, but I still have a long way to go.

No matter how right I feel that I am, I am not supposed to strike out at others in a hurtful way and that is exactly what I have done many times. Once again the old adage comes to mind. Think before you speak.

Psalm 50:19-23: *You dispatched your mouth for evil, and your tongue adheres to deceit. 20 You sit and speak against your brother, you slander your mother's son. 21 These have you done and I kept silent, You thought that I was like you; I will rebuke you and lay it clearly before your eyes! 22 Understand this now, you who have forgotten God, lest I tear you asunder and there be none to rescue. 23 He who offers confession honors Me; and one who orders [his] way, I will show him the salvation of God.*

Speaking ill of someone is equated with not knowing God. That's pretty hard, people! Yet if we repent we are honoring God, and in doing that we can receive the salvation of God, the salvation that comes through repentance and acceptance of Yeshua. Repentance is not a one-time event; it is an ongoing cleansing experience. We live it out each and every day that we are here on this earth. As we live it out before Him we live it out before our brothers and those who do not know Yahweh or Yeshua.

Psalm 52:4-6: *Your tongue devises treachery, like a sharpened razor that works deceit. 5 You loved evil more than good, falsehood more than speaking righteousness, Selah. 6 You have loved all devouring words, a tongue of deceit.*

I'll tell you one thing that is coming out from these passages of Scripture. The tongue is

associated with deceit in that the word of Yahweh is saying that our tendency is to do evil rather than to speak words of righteousness. Why do you think that is? Think carefully about that.

Our tongues are compared to a sharpened razor. They slice and dice and leave our brothers and sisters lying in our wake, battered and bruised, trying to figure out what it was that hit them. How many times have you experienced this? We expect this type of behavior from those who we say are of the world but from fellow believers in the Messiah Yeshua?

My oh my oh my, what has come out of the mouths of those who claim to know Yeshua! We have done more damage to our brothers and sisters in Messiah, and what kind of an example have we been to those who do not know Yeshua? We need to clean our acts up.

Psalm 57:5: *My soul is among lions, I lie with men who are aflame; people whose teeth are spears and arrows, and whose tongue is a sharp sword.*

Razors and swords and evil and deceit. Boy, our tongues are not being described in very flattering terms here and everywhere else in Scripture. I am only touching the surface in this paper. I would encourage you to do an in-depth study, not only of the tongue but associated word studies on gossip, slander, etc. This can be a very fascinating study and can show us things that we really do not want to see about ourselves.

We really have to stop and take a close look at ourselves. We spend way too much time and effort looking at our brothers and sisters when we should be doubling that effort on ourselves. There is a Scripture that instructs us to remove the beam from our own eye first before we look on our brothers and sisters and judge them. ***Correction in love is one thing; judgment is another.***

Psalm 64:3-5: *Hide me from the counsel of the wicked, from the assembly of evildoers, 4 who have sharpened their tongue like the sword, and drawn their arrow—a bitter word—5 to shoot in stealth at the innocent; suddenly they shoot him and they are unafraid.*

Are you beginning to see a pattern forming here? The tongue is as bad as the sword and can do more damage, in some cases, than the actual weapon itself. The sword can wound the body and even bring death, but the tongue can bring hurt to the spirit. The body can heal and in time so can the spirit, but a lot of times we leave the person upon whom we have turned our tongues in a very vulnerable position, and they are very susceptible to further hurt.

I know of which I speak, for I speak, at times, with a 'wicked tongue.' What I mean is that I say things that can be hurtful when I should not have. Instead of being physically abusive, I am verbally abusive, and that can be more demeaning to the person at whom I aim my words than actually physically harming them. I don't make excuses for myself or my actions. I have had to, on more than one occasion, ask for forgiveness for my words.

I now try to watch what I say. I slip up from time to time, but I have finally come to the point where, if I cannot say something nice about someone, I try not to say anything at all. I am by nature a pessimist, seeing the cup as half-empty instead of half-full. My reasoning for this is that if things do not turn out the way I would like them to, then I am not that disappointed. But that attitude can carry over and infect every aspect of your life, including

not only your relationship with those close to you and those around you, but also your relationship with God.

Psalm 109:2-5: *For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me, they have spoken to me the language of falsehood. 3 And with words of hatred they have encircled me, and attacked me without cause. 4 In return for my love they accuse me, but I was in prayer. 5 They placed upon me evil in return for good, and hatred in return for my love.*

Regarding verse 4 the rabbinical commentary says: My love for them was genuine, as I would pray on their behalf.

In other words, despite what evil came upon David he prayed for those that caused evil to befall him. Where else have we seen this instruction? In the Brit Chadashah-the Renewed Testament. Pray for those who spitefully use you. Love your enemy. These words were spoken by our Messiah Yeshua and they take love to a whole new level. No matter what evil someone may bring upon us, we are to lift them up in prayer. And do you know what? Praying for those who are against you will bring you release from the anger that you store up inside of you. Praying for those who have come against you in word and deed will change you, and it can change the person or persons who hurt you.

I am sure that all of us can relate situations where we have been slandered and hurt by those that we thought were our friends. If we let that hurt simmer, it will fester like a sore and become infected with unforgiveness on our part. But when we lift them up in prayer and lift the situation up in prayer, Yahweh brings healing to our spirits. In bringing healing to our spirits, healing can come to our physical beings as well.

It has been shown that prayer works and can touch our physical bodies as well as our spirit. Don't go toe-to-toe with those who come against you. Love them and pray for them. Speak only good things about them. If you speak good of them, sooner or later you will begin to see the good in a bad situation.

Psalm 120:2-3: *Yahweh, rescue my soul from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. 3 What can He give you, and what can He add to you, O deceitful tongue?*

5315 נפש nephesh {neh'-fesh}

soul, self, life, creature, person, appetite, mind, living being, desire, emotion, passion, that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, soul, the inner being of man, living being, living being (with life in the blood), the man himself, self, person or individual, seat of the appetites, seat of emotions and passions, activity of mind

It is here that we see that the tongue and the words that come forth from our mouths harm the soul, that which gives us life, from whence our emotions come. When I talk about life being from the soul, I mean that in the sense that the soul is what brings us into being, the life force, that exists within us. This is that part of Yahweh that exists within us that makes us like Him in the sense that we have the emotions that our Creator has. But it is the Ruach or Spirit of Yahweh that brings even more of our Creator into our very makeup, that part that connects us to our heavenly Father and joins us to the Living Word, Yeshua.

Proverbs 10:31: *The mouth of a righteous one speaks wisdom, but a duplicitous tongue*

will be cut off.

Proverbs 12:19: *True speech is established forever, but a false tongue is only for a moment.*

You know, I never realized just how much the Bible had to say about the tongue and the words that we speak with it. The slander or falsehood that comes from our mouths will not last forever even though in our society it seems to be the gossip that lasts longer than the truth. What does that say about our society? Are we a society that draws its laws from the Torah of God or one which draws from the lies that come from that great deceiver, haSatan?

How many build their foundation on the Rock—Yeshua and the words that He gave to us to establish us—the Torah! The truth is established forever. That means *forever*. In this passage the Hebrew word used for "ever" is not the one that is usually used. Here it is:

5703 עד `ad {ad}

perpetuity, for ever, continuing future, ancient (of past time), for ever (of future time), of continuous existence, for ever (of God's existence)

In most passages that use "forever," the Hebrew word that is usually used is `olam'. But the meaning of the Hebrew word used here, and, mirrors what `olam' means. It has always existed and will always exist. The truth will always be, while falsehood will not. So it may be that our society thrives on the falsehoods that abound today, but in the end the truth will be left standing when all is said and done.

Proverbs 15:4: *A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but corruption of it is damage of the spirit.*

The tree of life in Hebraic or Jewish thought is equated to the Torah. But even more than that, we as believers in the Messiah Yeshua realize that Yeshua is the Living Torah, the Living Tree of Life, who brings soothing to our souls and our spirits. The message that He brings is one of peace that passes all understanding but nevertheless is a peace that we so desperately need. Our words of anger and hate and mistrust and the gossip that we bring into the Body do nothing but tear the Body of Messiah apart.

Where is the love that we are supposed to have, not only for one another but also for those who gossip against us? Where is the forgiveness that we are to freely give? People of Yahweh, repent and be forgiven as we forgive those who come against us. Yeshua instructed us to forgive those who trespass against us, and He further instructed us to forgive seven times seventy those who trespass against us.

This is not an easy thing to do, my friends. Forgiving without strings attached is not easy. Remember that if you do, try not only to forgive but to apologize for your part in the misunderstanding. If it is not accepted by the other party, you have done what you were instructed to do and now all you can do is turn it over to Yahweh in prayer.

Proverbs 17:4: *An evildoer is attentive to iniquitous speech; a false person listens to a destructive tongue.*

Proverbs 17:20: *The perverse of heart will not find good, and one duplicitous in his tongue*

will fall into evil.

Watch what you say. Solomon is the accepted writer of Proverbs and he had been blessed by Yahweh with the gift of wisdom. Yet even in that superior wisdom, it did him no good in the end because he followed after the gods of his many wives and turned away from Yahweh. It was because of Solomon's sin that the united Kingdom of Israel was torn in two.

The words of his wives brought Solomon down from the heights of being blessed by God to the depths of being lost in idolatry. We need to take this as an example for us in our lives that one day we can be close to Yeshua and the next day we can be far away and not realize just how far we have drifted off course.

This brings to mind the many people that I have known over the years who, while once professing faith in Yeshua, come into the truth of what the Bible really has to say about their Hebraic Roots. But as they journey from their place in Christianity towards a better and fuller understanding of their Hebraic or Jewish Roots they begin to look to the traditions and customs of the Jewish faith while taking their eyes off the author of their faith—Yeshua! Ultimately, and I have personally seen this, they embrace Judaism and reject Yeshua.

Guard your faith, my brother and sisters, and cherish what you have. Cling to Yahweh and Yeshua and call upon the Ruach HaKodesh to fill you up with the might and power of the Holy One of Israel! Rejoice in your Messiah Yeshua and give thanks to His Father, Yahweh, who asked Him to give up His life for us.

Proverbs 18:21: *Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love [to use] it will eat its fruit.*

Truer words were never spoken! Life and death are in our mouths and come forth from our tongues. Do you try to bring life or death through your tongue? Do you try to speak kind words or words that bring hurt? I have spoken words over the years that have brought hurt to many, and I have been on the receiving end of words that have hurt me. We have the power of life and death in our mouths. We need to keep a tight reign on our tongues and what we say with it. Build up; do not tear down.

Proverbs 25:23: *[As] the north wind brings forth rain, [so] stealthy slander brings forth an angry face.*

Proverbs 26:28: *A lying tongue hates those it oppresses, but a smooth mouth will turn [the hatred] back.*

Jeremiah 9:7(8): *Their tongue is like a drawn arrow, speaking deceit; with his mouth one speaks peace with his fellow, but inside of him he lays his ambush.*

Are you seeing just how powerful our tongues are? Do you see just how much bad our tongues can do when we use them for the purpose of speaking gossip? These things do not glorify God! Speak the words of truth, and understand that the word of truth is the Torah and the Torah is Yeshua. Gossip and slander do not come forth from the mouth of the Son of God. We are called to imitate Him. Are you?

Do your words divide the Body of Messiah or bring it together? Has a root of bitterness taken hold of you? Has someone who is close to you spoken words that have hurt you and

you have let that resentment take root in your spirit and now it is festering like an open wound? Forgive! Even if the offending party does not forgive you or does not want to speak with you, forgive! It will be like a soothing balm to your spirit once you let go of the root of bitterness. No matter how right you may feel or justified in your anger, let it go.

Allow the Spirit of Yahweh and His love to flow through your innermost being and bring you life everlasting. You must first forgive before you can be forgiven. This forgiveness from you frees up Yahweh to pour out His healing love upon you and then allows your prayers to come before the throne of God.

The tongue brings life or death. Which will it be for you? I choose life. I choose to tame that wild member of my body and bring it into submission not just to me but to Yahweh. I choose to allow Yeshua to work through me, not in spite of me.

James 3:5-6, 8: *So also, the tongue is a small member and it exalts itself. Also, a little fire causes large forests to burn. 6 And the tongue is a fire and the world of sin is like a forest. And the tongue, though it is [one] among the members, defiles our whole body and sets on fire the successions of our generations that roll on as wheels; and it burns also with fire. 8 But the tongue, no man is able to subdue; this evil, when it is not restrained, is full of the poison of death.*

If you take the time to think about the Scriptures that I have presented to you in this article, you will see that the tongue and the words that come from it hold a lot of power for something so small in our body. In this article I have only scratched the surface on this subject; I hope to do another article in the next issue of the Journal on gossip. The two subjects go together and are intricately tied one to the other.

I feel very strongly about gossip and slander and those things that are associated with it. We have laid out for us in the Bible the means to resolve any differences that we may have with one another. Why is it that we cannot follow the Scriptural dictates as shown to us in the Book of Matthew? They are very simple to do and give us a system that obviously was used by the Shalichim/Apostles in their dealings with the congregations that they planted and among themselves. We see Biblical evidence that a Beit Din or House of Judgment was in place within the community of believers, at least in Jerusalem. We see that Peter and Paul both submitted to this Beit Din and that James was the head, or in Hebrew the 'nasi,' or president of the Beit Din.

If we would order our congregational disputes being resolved around this format, I believe that things would be so much easier. But in doing this we need to know that our leaders are above reproach and that they are in submission to the Torah. The Torah is the constitution of Israel. It is our declaration of independence from the ways of the world and brings us the freedom that Yahweh offers us. God's kingdom is not a democracy. God is in control. Since He created us, who then would know better what it is that we need? He did not have Moses write down the Torah in order for us to toss it away.

The Torah is God-given, and the writers were Ruach-inspired. As men, we are fallible, as shown to us time and time again throughout the Bible. But in our weaknesses we see the power of Yahweh shine through. When we make mistakes, we need to humble ourselves before Him and ask to be forgiven and in turn forgive those who have wronged us, as well as realizing that we may also be at fault. Admitting that we may be wrong is not an easy thing to do. Our pride and the way we are taught today is against our taking any

responsibility for our actions. Our way of life teaches us to exalt ourselves. We are taught, even though it is not always said, that we can be like gods. Our way of life, our technological advances, our science, all tell us that we can depend on ourselves and that to believe in a higher being only makes us weak.

But you know what? It's in that weakness that God is exalted. Paul had a thorn in his flesh that he prayed to God three times to have it removed, and God refused. He told Paul that it was in weakness that men would see the glory and the power of God. We are weak, but in Yeshua we are made strong. The world and even other believers may come against us for our walk as part of Messianic Israel, but in the end our reward will come from the Author of all Creation, not from the author of destruction. The world will go its own way and pay the price in the end. We are called not to be citizens of this world but to hold fast to our faith in Yeshua and the citizenship that we have waiting for us in the Kingdom of God.

Let's try to remember that we are emissaries of Yeshua sent out like He sent out the seventy. We are called to be a light in this world not just to those who do not know Yeshua but to those who know Him but need a guide to bring them back to the straight and narrow path. We may know that the Torah is still valid, that the seventh day Sabbath is the day Yahweh gave to us for our weekly gathering to honor Him, and that the dietary laws are still in effect; the bottom line is that we have grace and Torah, and they go hand in hand.

But keep in mind that those who are our brothers and sisters in Messiah and even those who are not are where we once were. Share with them the truth, but in love and mercy. Extend the 'chesed', lovingkindness of God to those you come across in your daily lives. Love your enemies as well as your friends. Even if we reject Him, I believe that Yeshua still loves us, as we are His creation. Though even in that unlimited love, rejection of Yeshua carries a cost. Think before you speak. If you do not have something nice to say about someone then do not say anything at all. Let me close with this passage from **1 Peter 3:10-11**:

Therefore, he who desires life and loves to see good days should keep his tongue from evil and his lips should not speak guile. 11 Let him turn away from evil and let him do good, and let him seek shalom and let him pursue it.

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