

FOOD FOR
THOUGHT
TO SPARK
CONVERSATION

SHABBOS MENU

PART OF THE CCHF SHABBOS TABLE MACHSOM L'FI PROGRAM • PARSHAS LECH LECHA 5781 • ISSUE 214

WHAT YOU SAY AND WHAT YOU MEAN

Some people think they're very clever. They can insult another person with words that sound perfectly innocent. Does that make the speaker innocent?

THE DILEMMA

One Chanukah the local Bros rented a skating rink for the girls to enjoy. One girl, Shifra, skates as if she's been doing it all her life. She's graceful and brave enough to try difficult turns and jumps. Another girl, Yocheved, is unathletic and scared to fall. She clings to the rail that goes around the edge of the skating rink, taking small, shaky steps. Shifra derives quite a bit of satisfaction in Yocheved's struggle because outside the skating rink, in the classroom, Yocheved "skates circles" around Shifra.

When the girls finish, they sit together unlacing their skates and slipping their cold, tired feet back into their shoes. "Wow, my feet are killing me," Yocheved says. "Poor Yocheved," Shifra addresses another girl. "You saw how hard she was working just trying not to fall?"

Are these words empathy or are they loshon hora?



THE HALACHAH

Shifra's intention makes the difference. Even though the words could be interpreted two ways (demeaning Yocheved's ability or feeling for her pain), and Yocheved feels free to say it in front of Shifra, the fact that she wants to demean Shifra makes it loshon hora.

Sefer Chofetz
Chaim Hilchos
Loshon Hora
Klal 3:2

PARTICIPANTS SPEAK

I love when our Tatty reads the Shabbos Menu at our Shabbos table! It is so exciting for us kids to guess the halachah to the dilemma. We always make sure to remind our Tatty to print it out before Shabbos. Thank you!

Yehudis S.
Age 6
Baltimore, MD

FOR QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS, EMAIL

Shabbosmenu@cchfglobal.org

"The fool

vents

all his anger,
but the wise man
comes afterward and

assuages
it."

— Mishlei 29:11



"I saw it with my own eyes." That's the most iron-clad evidence we can imagine.

When it comes to judging another Jew, however, the Torah tells us to also use our brains, not just our eyes. With the mitzvah "Judge your fellow to the side of merit," we learn that we must avoid jumping to negative conclusions about the information our eyes behold.

R' Shlomo Yehuda Rechnitz, well-known businessman, *baal tzedakah*, and chairman of the board of CCHF, tells a story that proves just how wrong our eyes can be:

Many people in need seek R' Shlomo Yehuda's help. One day, a man sat down next to him in shul, obviously trying to make contact with him. As the man opened his *siddur* to *daven*, R' Shlomo Yehuda noticed that he was holding it upside-down. He was apparently a fraud, and his would-be benefactor decided that if this man showed up at his door seeking a contribution, he would expose his fakery.

Two days later, the *tzedakah* collector arrived. R' Shlomo Yehuda invited him in, sat him down and engaged him in conversation. The man's responses seemed appropriate. Finally, R' Shlomo Yehuda asked him if he could read. The man replied that he could.

"Could you please read from this?" R' Shlomo Yehuda asked the man, handing him a *siddur*. The man took the *siddur*, turned it upside-down, and began to read fluently. He turned the page and read some more. Shocked, R' Shlomo Yehuda asked the man to explain his odd reading method.

"I grew up in Yemen," the man said. "We were so poor that we could only afford one *siddur* for the whole class. The *rebbe* held it and we gathered around him. I was directly opposite him, so this is how I learned to read."

ARE YOU SEEING IT UPSIDE-DOWN?



R' Shlomo Yehuda realized that it was *he* who was seeing "upside-down" when he judged this sincere Jew to be a fraud. Our *ahavas Yisrael* opens our mind to what our eyes can't see.

TALK ABOUT IT

What saved R' Shlomo Yehuda from making the mistake of sending the man away as soon as he showed up at the door?

sage advice

DO NOT DISTURB

Rav Yaakov Meir Schechter of Yerushalayim tells a story about his Rebbe, R' Ephraim'le, that provides us with a standard against which to measure our words and actions:

A guest came to R' Ephraim'le's home. The Rebbe led the man to the room where he was to sleep and entered to set up the bed. However, after taking a few steps into the room, the Rebbe backed out. He waited a few moments and then peeked in again, and once again he backed out. Finally, on his third attempt, the Rebbe entered the room and made the bed for his guest.

The guest, curious as to what the problem might have been, asked the Rebbe to explain.

"An old chicken was asleep in the room," he said. "I didn't want to disturb her, so I waited for her to wake up and then I went in."

We can be sure that a person who wouldn't think of disturbing a sleeping chicken would take great precautions to avoid disturbing a human being in any way. While our sensitivity may never reach the level of R' Ephraim'le's, we would live our lives on a whole different level if we made his criteria our own. "I don't want to disturb anyone" – with *loshon hora*, with unkind words, with selfish, uncaring deeds or any other negative behavior. A person who makes this a motto for his life will live a life of peace.

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