

FOOD FOR
THOUGHT
TO SPARK
CONVERSATION

SHABBOS MENU



PART OF THE CCHF SHABBOS TABLE MACHSOM L'FI PROGRAM • SHABBOS PARSHAS NOACH 5783 • ISSUE 314

TREADING ON A MINEFIELD

You want to speak up to protect yourself from someone who intends to harm you. You know who can help to influence that person in the right direction. You're ready to speak—but if you don't take seven vital steps before you speak, your permitted speech can quickly be transformed into loshon hora.

T H E

DILEMMA

After ten years, Yishai was forced out of his job by an angry, aggressive new boss who gave him no peace. Because he quit of his own accord, he received no unemployment compensation. He demanded severance pay and his boss refused, adding that if Yishai pressed the matter, it would ruin his chances of getting a new job.

Now Yishai wants to bring his situation to a community activist who has settled many business disputes. He wants to detail the abuse he endured on the job and the threat he was under. But with so much anger and ill will toward his boss, how could this not turn into loshon hora? He must carefully check and re-check his situation according to the rules of *to'eles* to be certain that his true purpose is to protect himself, not to disparage his boss. What questions must he ask himself?



T H E

HALACHAH

To steer clear of a grievous error, Yishai must ask:

Did I see my boss's misdeeds myself? Do his words and deeds meet the standards in *halachah* that define damage? Is there a possibility that I can resolve this issue directly with my boss? Am I exaggerating or omitting any detail so as to make him look worse? Do I have a constructive purpose in speaking? Is there some way I can protect myself without relating this information to others? Will telling others about the situation cause my boss more damage than he would incur in a *beis din*?

*Sefer Chofetz Chaim,
Hilchos Loshon Hora 10:14*

Reviewed by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Lowy. For discussion only; actual halachic decisions should be made by a *rav* or halachic expert on a case-by-case basis.

PARTICIPANTS SPEAK



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Guarding
one's tongue from evil
and his ears from
hearing forbidden
speech, will
remain
difficult
for a person for
only a few weeks."

*- Shmiras HaLoshon
Shaar HaTevunah ch. 3*

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MALKA BREINDEL A"H BAS SHMUEL FISHEL YLCH"Y



RAV SHTEINMAN'S PRESCRIPTION

An Israeli man emigrated to London and opened a pharmacy in a Jewish neighborhood. The neighbors began shifting their business from the local branch of a chain operation to the Israeli man's store.

The chain executives noticed, and began a campaign of threats to drive the competitor out of the neighborhood. For six months the pressure continued, and the stress became unbearable for the store owner. But what could he do?

One day he laid out his woes to a religious customer.

"Go back to Israel," the customer suggested, "and speak to Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman. He'll know what to do."

The Israeli followed the customer's advice. Soon he found himself face-to-face with Rav Aharon Leib. "They've been hounding me for six months to close down my store!" he exclaimed.

"So what's the problem?" the Rav asked him. "Close it down."

The man was astounded. "How will I live? How will I pay off my business debts?"

"Figure out how much you need to be able to close," the Rav instructed. "Let's figure it out right now."

The man calculated that he needed 70,000 pounds (\$100,000 at the time). Rav Shteinman impressed upon him that this was certainly not beyond Hashem's capacity. "*Naar hayisi v'gam zakanti v'lo ra'isi mevater mafsid*—I have been young, now I have grown old, yet I have never seen anyone suffer loss by yielding to another," he said. "Hashem will never abandon you. He wants shalom, not fighting. Be *mevater* and Hashem will take care of you."

Gulping down his doubts, the man agreed to close his business.

"OK, good. Do it now," said Rav Shteinman. The man called his competitor and told him that he would be closing the business. The startled competitor

suspected a trick. He gathered executives from the chain and tried to figure out the strategy. Their inquiries led them to Rav Shteinman's door, where they discovered that the Israeli's "business guru" was a humble rabbi who learned *Gemara* all day.

Rav Shteinman revealed his crafty strategy to them, which was simply to build

sage advice

TAKING TWO

The doors of the new quarters of Kehal Darchei Shalom finally opened. While many people had worked hard to make it happen, Moshe and Binyamin were the ones who took the responsibility. One last detail had to be decided, and the two men called together the building committee to discuss it.

"These days, we need top-of-the-line security," said Moshe. "The number of anti-Semitic incidents in this country has shot way up! We have to protect our kehillah, make sure that...."

"Stop reading the news!" Binyamin interrupted. "They blow everything out of proportion. We already have a security guard and cameras, and...."

"You're hiding your head in the sand!" Moshe said hotly. "What would it take for you to see..."

"Maybe we should all carry guns!" Binyamin taunted. The other committee members glanced around uncomfortably.

"Let's table this for now," said one. "We'll get the rav to weigh in if we can't agree."

What might have happened if, instead of jumping in with his point of view, Binyamin had let Moshe say his piece? What if Binyamin opened his own argument by saying something like, "As Moshe says, there's no doubt that security is becoming a more serious issue for shuls. I do have a bit of a different take, though...."

Moshe would perceive that he had been understood, not dismissed as paranoid. Binyamin would have won the argument, because the committee would realize that he was taking both points of view into account as he came to his decision.

This is how Hillel's interpretation of *halachah* almost always triumphed over that of Shammai. The *Gemara* says that Shammai would speak first, and then Hillel would give his opinion. But before he did so, he would cite Shammai's opinion, showing humility and wisdom, and so his opinions were convincing.

We can all learn from Hillel. When we disagree with someone, we can listen, recognize and concede the other side's points that ring true. With an open mind, peace reigns, and the best solution emerges.

TALK ABOUT IT

Rather than listening to what the other side says, most people are busy mentally preparing their rebuttal. How can we ensure that we really listen?

peace in the world, trusting Hashem to bless and reward those who do so. The executives wanted "in." They hired the Israeli pharmacist to manage a new store they had opened, at a salary equal to what he had been earning. The Israeli had been *mevater*, and as Rav Shteinman had promised, Hashem didn't let him down.

TALK ABOUT IT

How could Rav Shteinman have been so certain that Hashem would reward the man's *vatranus*?

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