

# TEN RULES OF SHMIRAS HALOSHON

Loshon hora means the making of a derogatory or damaging remark about someone. The Torah forbids one to denigrate the behavior or character of a person or to make any remark that might cause physical, psychological or financial harm.

*Here are ten basic rules to remember:*

- 1.** It is loshon hora to convey a derogatory image of someone even if that image is true and deserved. (False derogatory statements are called motzi shem ra, slander.)
- 2.** A statement which is not actually derogatory but can ultimately cause someone physical, financial, or emotional harm is also loshon hora.
- 3.** It is loshon hora to humorously recount an incident that contains embarrassing or damaging information about a person even if there is not the slightest intent that they should suffer any harm or humiliation.
- 4.** Loshon hora is forbidden even when you incriminate yourself as well.
- 5.** Loshon hora cannot be communicated in any way, shape, or form (i.e., through writing, body language, verbal hints, etc.).
- 6.** To speak against a community as a whole is a particularly severe offense. Harmful remarks about children are also loshon hora.
- 7.** Loshon hora cannot be related even to close relatives, including one's spouse.
- 8.** Even if the listener has previously heard the derogatory account or the information has become public knowledge and the subject will suffer no further harm by its repetition, it nevertheless should not be repeated.
- 9.** R'chilus, which is telling one person a derogatory statement that another person said about them, is forbidden because it causes animosity between people.
- 10.** It is forbidden to listen to loshon hora or r'chilus. If someone inadvertently hears loshon hora, it is forbidden to believe that it is true. One should give the person the benefit of the doubt. Assume the information is inaccurate or that the person does not realize they are doing something wrong.

**NOTE:** There are times when loshon hora is permitted or even required, i.e., when warning a person about potential harm, for example, a potential business or marriage partner. On the other hand, secondhand information and baseless impressions have momentous implications. The questions of when you are allowed or even required to speak loshon hora are complicated. A Rabbinic authority with expertise in the field of Shmiras Haloshon should be consulted in any of these cases.

Call the "Shmiras Haloshon שאלה Line" at (718) 951-3696  
from 9-10:30 pm to ask Halachic questions.

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