



Beth El
SYNAGOGUE

Elohi ntzor l'shoni mira... God, guard my tongue from evil.

We are talking about the laws of evil speech, lashon hara. So, let's start with a classic distinction.

Most people would agree that transmitting an untrue statement is wrong. But if it's a true statement, that is ok. Jewish law disagrees.

Just because something is true doesn't make it someone else's business. Lashon hara is a true statement but one that lowers the status of the person about whom it is said.

A classic example comes from a passage in the Torah that serves as the background for the reading on the first day of Rosh Hashana. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent when angels approach him with good news. Sarah is going to have a baby. Sarah happened to be listening from afar and laughed to herself saying, "I am going to have a baby? How's that possible with my husband is so old?!" Abraham heard Sarah laughing and said to the angels, "hey what's she laughing about." God immediately jumped in and said, "Oh that? Sarah laughed saying, "Shall I have a baby as old as I am."

You could hear the change. God deliberately misquoted Sarah to protect Abraham's feelings. Abraham was really old. But God didn't want to put enmity between him and Sarah by spreading lashon hara. Just because something is true, doesn't mean it should be passed on.

There are, of course times, when its necessary to pass on negative information. We'll talk about them in the coming weeks. But we would do well to remember the teaching of the great Musar rabbi, Israel Salanter, "Not everything that is thought should be said. And not everything that is said should be repeated."

Shanna Tova!

