

Don't bad-mouth yourself (*Tazria*)

Last night I had a spiritual coaching session with a client who is highly self-critical and who often talks herself down. And when this fact arose in our conversation, I explained to her that what she was doing was speaking *Lashon HaRa* about herself, and that just as the Torah teaches us that we should not speak *Lashon HaRa* about others, so too, we should not speak *Lashon HaRa* about ourselves.

Significantly, the topic of *Lashon HaRa* is very timely as *Parshat Tazria* details the laws of *Tzora'at* which, we are told (*Arachin* 15b), comes upon a person for a range of reasons including the fact that they have spoken *Lashon HaRa*.

Admittedly, when we address the laws of *Lashon HaRa*, we generally assume that this refers to someone speaking badly about another. However, as both the Lubavitcher Rebbe (*Iggrot Kodesh* 6:1621) and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (*Mesorat Moshe* Vol. 1 p. 499) explain, just as we may not speak *Lashon HaRa* about others, so too, we may not speak *Lashon HaRa* about ourselves.

But what is wrong with speaking *Lashon HaRa* about ourselves?

According to Rabbeinu Yonah (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 3:222), those who speak or hear *Lashon HaRa* about others develop feelings of contempt and hatred towards them. As a result, this then brings them to transgress the prohibition of hating others (see *Vayikra* 19:16). Applying this to ourselves, if we speak *Lashon HaRa* about ourselves, we are then likely to develop feelings of contempt and hatred towards ourselves.

But this itself is forbidden! Because while we are commanded to love others, we are also commanded to love ourselves (*ibid.* 19:18). Accordingly, it is wrong to speak *Lashon HaRa* about yourself because it will lead you to love yourself less and maybe, God forbid, even hate yourself.

Significantly, *Parshat Tazria* begins by speaking about the birth of children, and when a child is born, we focus on their tenderness, and hope and pray that they will grow up without experiencing hardship and without being on the receiving-end of unkind words.

Yet as we get older, not only are we all occasionally victims of *Lashon HaRa* from others, but we ourselves overlook our own tenderness and frequently become the ones who speak the worst *Lashon HaRa* about ourselves.

Overall, if we wish to be more careful about *Lashon HaRa*, then we should start with being careful about how we speak to ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom!