

KOIL MEVASSER

KAHAL JOSEPH CONGREGATION • 10505 SANTA MONICA BOULEVARD, LOS ANGELES, CA 90025 • 310.474.0559 • WWW.KAHALJOSEPH.ORG

Lashon Tov*Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi, Great Britain*

Is there such a thing as Lashon Tov?

As we saw last week, the sages understood tsaraat, the theme of this week's parsha, not as an illness but as a miraculous public exposure of the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about people. Judaism is a sustained meditation on the power of words to heal or harm, mend or destroy. Just as God created the world with words, so we create, and can destroy, relationships with words.

The rabbis said much about lashon hara, but virtually nothing about the corollary, lashon tov, "good speech." The phrase does not appear in either the Babylonian Talmud or the Talmud Yerushalmi. It figures only in two midrashic passages where it refers to praising God. But lashon hara does not mean speaking badly about God. It means speaking badly about human beings. If it is a sin to speak badly about people, is it a mitzvah to speak well about them? My argument will be that it is, and to show this, let us take a journey through the sources.



In Mishnah Avot, Ethics of the Fathers (2: 10-11), we read the following example:

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh.

He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring.

However, the practice of Rabban Yochanan in praising his disciples seems to stand in contradiction to a Talmudic principle:

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*Prayer Schedule***SHABBAT**

PARASHAT MEZORAH
Friday, April 8th
Minhah & Arbit 6:30 pm
Candle Lighting 7:00 pm

Saturday, April 9th
Shaharit 8:30 am
Tehillim before Minhah
Minhah & Arbit 6:30 pm
Motzei Shabbat 8:05 pm

WEEKDAYS

Sunday, April 10th
Shaharit 7:30 am

Monday-Friday
Shaharit 6:30 am

Wednesday, April 13th

The Seder—Let's Celebrate It Meaningfully This Year!
Class w/ R. Batzri 7:00 pm

TALMUD TORAH CLASSES

Tuesday, April 12th
Model Seder 4:00 pm

Thursday, April 14th
Regular Class 4:00 pm

EREV SHABBAT HAGADOL

PARASHAT ACHAREI
Friday, April 15th
Minhah & Arbit 6:30 pm
Candle Lighting 7:06 pm

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Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra said: Let no one ever talk in praise of his neighbour, for praise will lead to criticism. Arahin 16a

Rashi gives two explanations of this statement. Having delivered excessive praise [*yoter mida*], the speaker himself will come to qualify his remarks, admitting for the sake of balance that the person of whom he speaks also has faults. Alternatively, others will point out his faults. For Rashi, the crucial consideration is, is the praise judicious, accurate, true, or it is overstated? If the former, it is permitted; if the latter, it is forbidden. Evidently Rabban Yochanan was careful not to exaggerate.

Rambam, however, sees matters differently. He writes: "Whoever speaks well about his neighbour in the presence of his enemies is guilty of a secondary form of evil speech [*avak lashon hara*], since he will provoke them to speak badly about him" (Hilkhos Deot 7: 4). According to the Rambam the issue is not whether the praise is moderate or excessive, but the context in which it is delivered. If it is done in the presence of friends of the person about whom you are speaking, it is permitted. It is forbidden only when you are

among his enemies and detractors. Praise then becomes a provocation, with bad consequences.

Are these merely two opinions or is there something deeper at stake?

There is a famous passage in the Talmud which discusses how one should sing the praises of a bride at her wedding:

Our Rabbis taught: How should you dance before the bride [i.e. what should one sing]?

The School of Shammai say: [Sing] "The bride is as she is."

The School of Hillel say: [Sing] "The bride is beautiful and graceful."

The School of Beth Shammai said to the School of Hillel, "If she were lame or blind, would you sing that the bride is beautiful and graceful? Does the Torah not say, 'Keep far from falsehood'?"

The School of Hillel answered the School of Shammai: "According to your view, if someone has made a bad purchase in the market, should you praise it in his eyes or deprecate it? Surely, one should praise it in his eyes." (Ketubot 16b-17a)

The disciples of Hillel hold that at a wedding you should sing that the bride is beautiful, whether she is or not. Shammai's disciples disagree. Whatever the occasion, don't tell a lie. "Do you call that a lie?" the Hillelites respond.

In the eyes of the groom at least, the bride is beautiful, just as in the eyes of someone who has just made a purchase, he has made a good deal, even if in your opinion, he hasn't.

What's really at stake here is not just temperament – puritanical Shammaites versus good-natured Hillelites – but two views about the nature of language. The Shammaites think of language as a way of making statements, which are either true or false. The Hillelites understand that language is about more than making statements. We can use language to encourage, empathise, motivate and inspire. Or we can use it to discourage, disparage, criticise and depress. Language does more than convey information. It conveys emotion. It creates or disrupts a mood. The sensitive use of speech involves social and emotional intelligence. Language, in J. L. Austin's famous account, can be performative as well as informative.

The argument between Hillel and Shammai is similar to that between Rambam and Rashi. For Rashi, as for Shammai, the key question about praise is: is it true, or is it excessive? For Rambam as for Hillel, the question is: what is the context? Is it being said among enemies or friends? Will it create warmth and es-

teem or envy and resentment?

We can go one further, for the disagreement between Rashi and Rambam about praise may be related to a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of the command, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19: 18). Rashi interprets the command to mean: do not do to your neighbour what you would not wish him to do to you (Rashi to Sanhedrin 84a). Rambam, however, says that the command includes the duty "to speak in his praise" (Hilkhos Deot 6: 3). Rashi evidently sees praise of one's neighbour as optional, while Rambam sees it as falling within the command of love.

We can now answer a question we should have asked at the outset about the Mishnah in Avot that speaks of Yochanan ben Zakkai's disciples. Avot is about ethics, not about history or biography. Why then does it tell us that Rabban Yochanan had disciples? That, surely, is a fact not a value, a piece of information not a guide to how to live.

However, we can now see that the Mishnah is telling us something profound indeed. The very

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In Memoriam Community News

It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and to donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend prayer services in honor of loved ones.

Shabbat / 5 Nisan

Moshe ben Shemuel Somekh
Aaron Judah

Sunday / 6 Nisan

Mordechai ben Mattatya*
Edmond ben Moshe Somekh

Tuesday / 8 Nisan

Ada bat Mindel Okin*
Carolyn Frances bat Norman Ezra*
Alexander Nahum ben Mordechai

Wednesday / 9 Nisan

Malka Lurie

Thursday / 10 Nisan

Gohar bat Aga Mashallah
Aziza bat Miriam

Friday / 11 Nisan

Khatoon bat Simha
Avraham ben Shlomo Reuven*

Shabbat / 12 Nisan

Farha Mitana bat Rahma Regina Cohen
Raful ben Itzhak Faraj HaCohen
Luna bat Mazal Cohen
David ben Shlomo HaLevi

*To update, please call the office
at 310.474.0559.*

Refuah Shlemah

Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal Tov
bat Sulha Mitana ▪ Matilda
Louisa ▪ Yaheskel ben Regina ▪
Ayala bat Naomi ▪ Khayah Noa
bat Sara ▪ Haim ben Mordechai ▪
Pnina bat Esther ▪ Yosi ben
Esther ▪ Victor ben Latif ▪ Ramah
Regina bat Farha ▪ Aziza bat Sara
Judith bat Malka ▪ Ofek ben Yochai
▪ Efrayim Zev ben Fayga ▪ Sulha
Matana bat Mozelle ▪ Gershon ben
David ▪ Farangis Miriam bat
Touran ▪ David ben Leah ▪
Avraham Haim ben Miryam ▪
Yaakov ben Freda ▪ Rachel bat
Mazal Tov ▪ Avraham ben Rab-
bie ▪ Mazal Sigalit bat Rivkah ▪
Orit bat Tikvah ▪ Yaakov ben
Aliyah ▪ Chana Leah bat Reiza ▪
Victoria Cohen ▪ Avraham
Moshe ben Miriam

SHABBAT KIDDUSH

is sponsored by
Amy Yeshurun & Jonathan Philips
on the occasion of
their upcoming marriage
Mazal Tov!
Congratulations to the Parents
Diane & Bruce Philips
Miriam & Shlomo Yeshurun

SEUDAH SHLISHEET

is sponsored
in loving memory of
our father and grandfather

Sammy Dallal, z"l

by Mayer Dallal and
The Dallal Family

THANK YOU

Suzy Assia &
Selena Dallal

and all who assisted them with
planning the Hakarat HaTov
Luncheon in honor of Moussa
Shaaya and the outgoing Board
of Directors

THANK YOU

Manachi Kemareh
for your help and support in
organizing, planning and
implementing our festive
Seudat Purim

THANK YOU

Mrs. Nahid Sedagha
for graciously and generously
hosting KJ's Women's Rosh
Hodesh Celebration & Brunch.
The food was delicious and there
was so much positive energy
emanating from the group of
about 60 women.

Torah Readings

Parashat Metzora pp.470-477
Haftara pp. 477-479

SHABBAT MITZVOT

We offer for donation the following Mitzvot.

- 1. Petichat Hechal** opening of the ark;
- 2. Carrying of the Sefer Torah & Sefer Haftara;**
- 3. Hakamat Sefer** lifting of the Torah;
- 4. Mashlim*** The seventh aliya to the Torah who recites Kaddish;
- 5. Mafzir*** The last aliya to the Torah which includes the Haftara (read by the clergy unless member reading is preapproved). We suggest a minimum donation of \$126 or multiples of \$18 or \$26. You will receive confirmation before Shabbat to confirm if you will receive the aliya. Members may reserve in advance by calling the office. Non-members reserving aliyot should contact the office for availability at 310.474.0559. We appreciate your support.



Pesah Classes

with Rabbi Hagay Batzri

The Seder—Let's Celebrate It

Meaningfully, this Year

Wednesday, April 13, 2011

7:00 to 8:00 pm

Enrich your enjoyment of the Passover dinner, its blessings and stories and make this Seder your family's best ever.

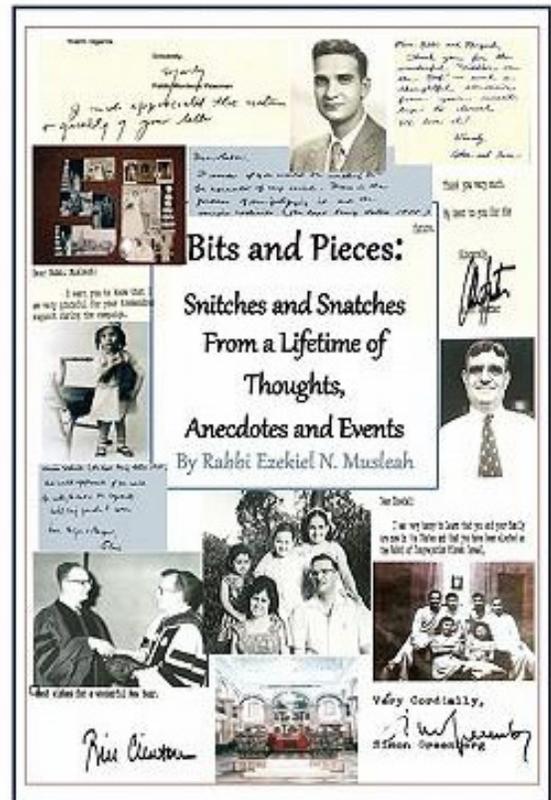
(Continued from page 2)

first statement in Avot includes the principle: "Raise up many disciples." But how do you create disciples? How do you inspire people to become what they could become, to reach the full measure of their potential? Answer: By acting as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai when he praised his students, showing them their specific strengths.

He did not flatter them. He guided them to see their distinctive talents. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "plastered well that never loses a drop", was not creative but he had a remarkable memory – not unimportant in the days before the Oral Torah was written in books. Elazar ben Arakh, the "ever-flowing spring," was creative, but needed to be fed by mountain waters (years later he separated from his colleagues and forgot all he had learned).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai took a Hillel-Rambam view of praise. He used it not so much to describe as to motivate. And that is lashon tov. Evil speech diminishes us, good speech helps us grow. Evil speech puts people down, good speech lifts them up. Focused, targeted praise, informed by considered judgment of individual strengths, and sustained by faith in people and their potentiality, is what makes teachers great and their disciples greater than they would otherwise have been. That is what we learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

So there is such a thing as lashon tov. According to Rambam it falls within the command of "Love your neighbour as yourself." According to Avot it is one way of "raising up many disciples." It is as creative as lashon hara is destructive. Seeing the good in people and telling them so helps it become real, becoming a midwife to their personal growth. If so, then not only must we praise God. We must praise people too.



Bits and Pieces: Snippets and Snatches

By Rabbi Ezekiel N. Musleah

Rabbi Musleah's latest book contains articles, correspondence, thoughts, anecdotes, rituals, prayers, and events; it is a compendium of recollections from Calcutta, Los Angeles, and other places and times in Rabbi Musleah's life.

Of local interest in a ritual Rabbi Musleah prepared for Kahal Yosef to atone for the dropping of a Sefer Torah, a note of thanks from KJ's President for leading prayer services, and a photograph of Mozelle Ezra, the mother of Sir David Ezra, whose gifts of the silver beautified Calcutta's Maghen David Synagogue and whose bells now decorate the Tebah of Kahal Yosef.

To purchase at the special price of \$25 plus shipping, contact renam27@comcast.net.

Kahal Joseph Congregation

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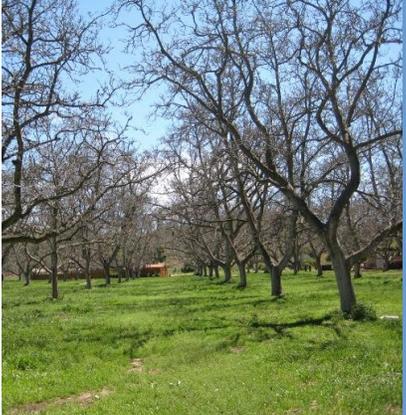
310.474.0559 phone 310.441.4059 fax

Selling of Hametz Mekhirat Hametz Form

We must receive this form by fax or mail
before Friday, April 15, 2011 at 12 noon.

Know all by these present that I _____ ,
do hereby authorize Rabbi Hagay Batzri, at Kahal Joseph Con-
gregation, 10505 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025, to
sell, transfer and assign all Hametz of whatever kind and nature,
of which I am possessed and seized, or in which I may have an
interest, wheresoever situated, in my residence at _____
_____ my place of business, or
any other place, without reservation and limitation. In witness
whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this on date
_____, 2011.

Signature _____ Date _____



Blessing of the Trees

BIRKAT HA'ILANOT

Sunday, April 24th

at Underwood Farms

MEET AT THE FARM

AT 11:00 AM

No Bus is available this year, so Everyone must drive or carpool. Volunteers with large vehicles are requested to transport community members who cannot drive themselves to the fieldtrip.

**3370 Sunset Valley Road
Moorpark, CA 93021
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