

# Speech in terms of *Rechilus*, *Lashon Hara*, and *Motzi Shem Ra* - Shavuot 5783

Source Sheet by Rabbi Marina Yergin

שמות כ':י"ב-ט"ו

(יב) כִּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
נָתַן לָךְ: {ס} {יג} לֹא תִרְצַח: {ס} לֹא תִנְאַף: {ס} לֹא תִגְזֹב: {ס} לֹא־תַעֲנֶה  
בְּרַעַי עֵד שָׁקֵר: {ס} {יד} לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ {ס} לֹא־תַחְמֹד אִשְׁת־רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדֶּךָ  
וְאִמְתּוֹ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וְחִמְרֶךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ: {פ} {טו} וְכָל־הָעַם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת  
וְאֶת־הַלְפִידִם וְאֵת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת־הַהָר עָשָׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיָּנֻעוּ וַיַּעֲמָדוּ מֵרָחֵק:

## Exodus 20:12-15

(12) Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that your God יהוה is assigning to you. (13) You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.** (14) You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox or ass, or anything that is your neighbor's. (15) All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance.

## Sforno<sup>1</sup> on Exodus 20:13

This includes spreading slander, *Lashon Hara*, speaking badly about people and something generally known as *Motzi Shem Ra*, defaming someone, ruining their reputation, and spreading damaging lies about others.

## What's the difference between *Rechilus*, *Lashon Hara*, and *Motzi Shem Ra*?

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1550) was a biblical commentator, philosopher, and physician from Italy.

### **Rabbi Yosef Karo<sup>2</sup>, Kesef Mishneh, De'ot 7:1**

One who "peddles gossip" (*rechilut*) refers to a person who says, "So and so did the following to you..." even though the information is not necessarily negative [but can nevertheless provoke arguments between parties]... since he carries the information around from one person to another, he is called a "peddler" [a traveling salesman of gossip].

### **Rambam<sup>3</sup>, Mishneh Torah, De'ot 7:2**

There is a sin that is much worse than *rechilut*, also included in the prohibition of "do not peddle gossip." This is known as *lashon hara*, or derogatory speech. This refers to someone who speaks in a derogatory manner about someone else--even though what he says is true. Someone who speaks *lashon hara* will say negative and derogatory things like, "So and so did the following..."

### **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, De'ot 7:2**

[The previous case refers to someone who speaks negative information that is true.] Someone who speaks derogatory or harmful information about someone that is untrue is called slander (*motzi shem ra*).

## **Why is this so important?**

### **Arakhin<sup>4</sup> 15b**

**In the West, Eretz Yisrael, they say: Third speech, i.e., malicious speech about a third party, kills three people. It kills the one who speaks malicious speech, and the one who accepts the malicious speech when he hears it, and the one about whom the malicious speech is said. Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, says: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Death and life are in the hand of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Does the tongue have a hand? Rather the verse comes to tell you that just as a hand can kill, so too a tongue can kill.**

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Joseph ben Ephraim Karo (1488-1575) was the author of the Shulchan Aruch and was a well-known Talmudist, author, and Rabbi. He wrote Kesef Mishneh (written in Nikopol, c. 1545 - c. 1575 CE), a commentary on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah.

<sup>3</sup> Rambam (1137 - 1204 CE) or Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon was perhaps the greatest intellectual and spiritual figure of post-Talmudic Judaism.

<sup>4</sup> Tractate within Talmud which was composed in Talmudic Babylon, c.450 - c.550 CE