

Source Sheet on Prohibitions on Loshon ha-ra and motzi shem ra and disclosing another's confidential secrets and Proper Etiquette for Speech

Deut. 24:9 - "Remember what the L-rd your G-d did unto Miriam by the way as you came forth out of Egypt." Specifically, she spoke against her brother Moses.

Yerushalmi Berachos 1:2

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "Had I been at Mount Sinai at the moment when the torah was given to Yisrael I would have demanded that man should have been created with two mouths- one for Torah and prayer and other for mundane matters. But then I retracted and exclaimed that if we fail and speak lashon hara with only one mouth, how much more so would we fail with two mouths

Bavli Arakhin15b

R. Yochanan said in the name of R.Yosi ben Zimra: He who speaks slander, is as though he denied the existence of the Lord: With out tongue will we prevail our lips are our own; who is lord over us? (Ps.12:5)

Gen R. 65:1 and Lev.R. 13:5

The company of those who speak slander cannot greet the Presence

Sotah 5a

R. Hisda said in the name of Mar Ukba: When a man speaks slander, the holy one says, "I and he cannot live together in the world." So scripture: "He who slanders his neighbor in secret.... Him I cannot endure" (Ps. 101:5).Read not OTO "him' but ITTO "with him [I cannot live]

Deut.Rabbah 5:10

R.Mana said: He who speaks slander causes the Presence to depart from the earth below to heaven above: you may see foryourselfthat this is so.Consider what David said: "My soul is among lions; I do lie down among them that are aflame; even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Ps.57:5).What follows directly ? Be Thou exalted O God above the heavens (Ps.57:6) .For David said: Master of the Universe what can the presence do on the earth below? Remove the Presence from the firmament.

MidrashTehillim 52:2

Behold how vicious is slander! It is more vicious than murder, unchastity and idolatry put together. In scripture each of these three transgressions is termed "great" but slander is spoken of in the plural as "great things". Thus Cain said of murder, "My punishment is more great than I can bear (Gen. 4:13); Joseph exclaimed of unchastity, "How then can I do this great wickedness?" (Gen. 39:9); Moses said of idolatry, "Oh this people have sinned a great sin" (Ex. 3:31). But of slander it is written, "The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaketh great things (Ps. 12:4) to tell you that slander is more vicious than the other three transgressions

Yerushalmi Peah 1:1;15d

A man is punished for 4 things in this world, but the principle punishment is meted out in the world to come. They are idolatry, unchastity, bloodshed, and slander, but the punishment for slander equals the other three put together

B. Arakhin 15b

R. Lakish said: He who speaks slander so enlarges his iniquities that they reach up to heaven, as is said, "They have set their mouth against the heavens when their tongue walketh through the earth (Ps. 73:9)

B. Arakhin 15b

R. Hisda said in the name of Mar Ukba: He who speaks slander deserves death by stoning

B. Pesahim 118a

R. Sheshet said in the name of R. Eleazar ben Azariah: He who speaks slander, he who accepts slander, and he who gives false testimony against his transgression deserve to be cast to the dogs, for the words "Ye shall cast it to the dogs (Ex. 22:30) are followed directly by "Thou shalt not take up (tissa) a false report (Ex. 23:1), which may be read, "Thou shalt not spread (tassi) a false report.

Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer 53

He who speaks slander has no portion in the world to come

B. Arakhin 15b

R. Hisda in the name of Mar Ukba: Of him who speaks slander, the Holy One says to the prince of Gehenna: I at him from above, and you at him from below, shall together condemn him

B. Arakhin 15a

The punishment of him who maligns the young women he wed as not being a virgin is greater than if he had seduced her or raped her. Thus we find that the decree of death against our forebears in the wilderness was sealed only after the spies had maligning the Land as is said, "By speaking thus, they tried

me as greatly as the ten other times together (when they did not heed Me); surely they shall not see the Land which I swore unto their fathers (Num. 14:22-23)

B. Sota 35b

The men who spread calumnies about the land died of pestilence in keeping with the Lord's emasure for measure (Num. 14:37). They died an unnatural death, said R. Simeon ben Lakish. Unnatural in what way ? According to R. Hanina bar Papa, R. Shela of Kefar Temarta expounded the verse as hinting that the tongue of each spy grew so unnaturally long that it reached down to his navel, and worms crawled out of his tongue and entered into his navel, and out of his navel back into his tongue. According to R. Nahman bar Isaac, the spies choked in the spasm of croup.

B Arukhin 15b and En Yaakov ad loc.

R. Eleazar ben Perata said: Pause and consider the spies, and you will understand how pernicious is the effect of calumny. If such befell the spies, who spoke calumny only of trees and stones, how much more and more will befall him who speaks calumny of his neighbor

Sifre Deut. 175

R. Hanina said: plagues of leprosy come only on account of speaking calumny . For as the sages said, you can see for yourself that such plagues come on account of calumny . Even the righteous Miriam, who spoke calumny of her brother Moses- plagues clung to her, as a sign and a warning to all given to speaking calumny. Hence, "remember what the L-rd thy God did unto Miriam.

Now the matter may be reasoned a fortiori: if Miriam who made certain not to speak to Moses directly, did so for Moses' own benefit (so he would take back his life and have more children), and spoke for the glory of Him who is everywhere and for the increase of the population of the world- was punished thus, how much more and more will he who speaks publicly in disparagement of his neighbor be punished

B. Arukhin 15b

Resh Lakish said: The verse : This shall be the law concerning the metzorah (leper) Lev 14:2 means "this shall be the law concerning motzi shem rah (him who speaks calumny).

Ex. Rabbah 1:30

"thinkest thou to kill me, as thou didst kill the Egyptian? And Moses.... Said: "Surely the thing is known (Ex. 2:14). For Moses had been meditating in his heart: How have Israel sinned that they should be enslaved more than any other nation?" But upon hearing one of the quarreling men say right out what he, Moses, had done, he said to himself: "Now the thing is known," now I know why the Israelites are enslaved . Talebearing is rife among them. How can they ever be worthy of delierence

B. Shabbat 56b

R. Judah said in the name of Rav: When David told Mephibosheth “Thou and Ziba divide the land (2 Sam 19:30) a divine voice came forth and said to him: Rehobaom and Jerobaom will divide the kingdom.

R. Judah went on to say in the name of Rav: Had David not heeded the calumny against Mephibosheth, the kingdom of the house of David would not have been divided, Israel in the north would not have served idols, and we would not have been banished from our land.

Genesis Rabbah 20:1

“A slanderer shall not be established in the earth” (Ps. 140:12). R. Levi said : In the time-to-come the Holy One will take the heathen nations of the world, cast them down into Gehenna and ask them: Why did you despoil My children with fines? They will reply: Because out of their ranks came men of evil tongue with tall tales about their neighbors’ possessions. Then the Holy One will take both the heathen nations and the slanderers, and cast them down into Gehenna.

B. Baba Metzia 83b

R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon used to apprehend thieves. So R. Joshua ben Korhah sent word to him: “O Vinegar son of wine!” How long will you deliver up the people of our God for slaughter? R. Eleazar sent word back: “I weed out thorns from the vineyard.” R. Joshua replied “Let the Owner of the vineyard come and Himself weed out the thorns.”

B. Gittin 7a

Mar Ukba sent a message to R. Eleazar saying, “Certain men are acting against me, but I am able to deliver them into the hands of the government. What shall I do? R. Eleazar scribbled his answer on the same message: “I said, “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep a curb upon my mouth, while the wicked is before me” (Ps. 39:2), meaning: Even though the wicked is before I will keep a curb on my mouth. Mar Ukba sent another message to R. Eleazar: They are troubling me very much, and I can put up with them no longer. “ R. Eleazar replied with quotation: “Resign thyself unto the Lord, and wait patiently (hit’holel) for Him” (Ps. 37:7); that is to say: Wait for the Lord and He will utterly prostrate them (halalim) before you. In spite of them, go to the house of study morning and evening, and there will soon be an end to them. R. Eleazar had hardly spoken these words when Geniva (an antagonist of Mar Ukba) was placed in chains for execution.

B. Arakhin 15b

In considering the verse “Death and life are in the hand of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21), R. Hama son of R. Hanina asked: Is it conceivable for the tongue to have a hand? No, but what the verse means is that the tongue can be as murderous as the hand. One might have thought that, just as the hand can kill only what is near it, so the tongue could kill only what is near it; therefore Scripture says, “Their tongue is an arrow shot out (Jer. 9:7). One might assume that just as an arrow kills only up to a distance of forty or at

most fifty cubits, so the tongue could kill only up to a distance of forty and at most fifty cubits; therefore Scripture states, “They have set their mouths against the heavens, while their tongues range over the earth (Ps. 73:9).

Gen R. 98.19

Sharp arrows of the mighty are like coals of broom (Ps. 120.4). Why does the text liken the evil tongue to an arrow rather than to any other weapon? Because all other weapons strike at close quarters, while the arrow strikes from afar. Likewise the evil tongue – something said in Rome can kill in Syria. Nor is the evil tongue likened to any coals, but only to coals of broom, for all other coals when extinguished without are also extinguished within; but the coals of broom, even when extinguished without, continue to burn within. So it is with the victim of slander- even though you go and endeavor to appease him, and he acts appeased, yet he continues to burn within.

P.Peah 16a

R. Samuel bar Nahman said: Why is the evil tongue called thrice slaying tongue? Because it slays three persons: the person speaking, the person spoken to, and the person spoken of. And the proof? Doeg who spoke evil; Saul to whom it was spoken; and Nob the city of priests of whom it was spoken.

Midrash Tehillim 120:4

The tongue is like an arrow. Why? Because if a man takes his sword in hand to slay his fellow, who then pleads with him and begs for mercy, the would be slayer can change his mind and return the sword to its sheath. But once the would be slayer has shot and let fly an arrow, it cannot be brought back even if he wants to do so.

B.Arukhin 15b

R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Yose ben Zimra: What is meant by the verse “What more can be given unto thee, what more can be done for protection against thee, thou deceitful tongue? (Ps. 120:3) The Holy One said to the tongue: All other parts of a man’s body stand erect outside; you are within. Not only that but I encompassed you with two walls, one of bone (the teeth) and one of flesh (the cheeks).”What more can be given unto thee, and what more can be done for protection against thee thou deceitful tongue?

Leviticus Rabbah 16:4

R.Eleazar said in the name of R. Yose ben Zimra: Man has twohundred and forty eight parts, some prone, some erect. The tongue is placed between two cheeks, with a water channel of saliva passing under it, besides being guarded by several other enfoldings such as teeth and lips. Yet pause and consider what searing burns it inflicts! How many more and more such burns would the tongue inflict if it were standing erect.

Yalkut Ki Tetze 933

How vicious is evil tongue! A parable of a man smitten on both legs, who greatly disturbed a principality. People said If he were whole, how much more and more would he disturb! So, too the tongue. Though cut to small size and placed within the mouth, yet it disturbs the world greatly. To what may the tongue be compared? To a dog: though it is chained and confined, and placed in the innermost of three chambers, yet all people fear it when it barks. If it were outside (unchained) what would it do! So the evil tongue. It is placed within beyond the opening of the mouth; within, beyond the lips. Yet it smites without cease. If the tongue were outside how much more and more would it smite.

Hence the Holy One said to man I can save you from all troubles that come upon you. But when it concerns the evil tongue, you must make yourself all but invisible and you will suffer no injury.

B. Arukhin 15b

Resh Lakish said: In defense of himself, the serpent could have pleaded: Does the serpent bite without a whispered command from on high? (Eccl 10:11). Instead of defending himself he could respond with a question: "And what advantage does he get who uses his tongue for evil? Hence in the time to come when all beasts gather together, go to the serpent and say, "The lion romps and devours. The wolf rends and consumes. What enjoyment do you get from poisoning creatures?" The serpent will reply, "Well what advantage does he get who uses his tongue for evil?"

P. Peah 1:1, 16a; Tanhuma B. Hukkat 8; Lev. R. 26:2

R. Samuel son of R. Nahman said: if a serpent is asked, "why are you found among fences?" it is likely he will answer, "because I made a breach in the fence of the world". If asked "why do you slither along with your tongue darting in the dust?" The serpent is likely to answer "because the tongue brought me to this state." If asked "why is it that when other animals bite their single bite does not kill but when you bite you kill?" What benefit do you derive from that? The serpent is likely to answer "Does the serpent bite unless there is a whispered command (Eccles. 10:11). If I were not told from heaven, "Bite!" I would not bite". If asked "and why, though you bite one limb, do all other limbs feel the poison at once?" the serpent is likely to reply "Are you asking me? Ask the man of evil tongue who dwells in Rome and slays in Syria, or who dwells in Syria and slays in Rome"

B. Yoma 9b

"They of my people who live together (megurei) turn to the sword, smite therefore upon the high (Ezek. 21:17). R. Eleazar said: The verse refers to men who eat and drink with one another, yet stab one another with swords of their tongues.

P. Pe 1:1 16a

R. Ishmael taught: “Do not go as a peddler among the people” (Lev. 19:16) refers to peddling by the evil tongue. R. Nehemiah taught: Do not be like the peddler who transports the words of one to the other and the words of the other to one.

B. Arukhin 15b

What constitutes evil speech? Rabbah said: As when one says, There is fire burning in the oven of so and so's house. Abbaye asked : But what harm does he do? He merely provides information. Nevertheless said Rabbah said such information may be uttered with the intent to slander, and though he were saying: Where else would such a fire be burning except in the house of so and so, who has plenty of meat and fish?

P. Peah 1:1

When R. Yochanan was asked what is evil speech? He replied What is uttered explicitly as well as what is only hinted at.

Thus when dealers in flax had a gathering to allot to each a portion of a royal levy, one of them whose name was Ben Hovetz, did not come. So when the question was asked What shall we eat today? One person answered Hovetz, “soft cheese”. At that the others reminded of their absent colleague said: Ben Hovetz should be made to come.

Here said Rabbi Yochanan we have an instance of evil speech uttered obliquely.

Another example: When the council of Sepphoris held a meeting for a similar purpose, one of them, whose name was Yochanan, did not come. One of the council asked another: Should we not visit the learned Yochanan today since he must be ill? Instantly all said: Yochanan should be made to come.

Here said R. Simeon ben Lakish we have an instance of evil speech disguised as piety

Bava Batra 164b

A folded deed was once brought before Rabbi Judah I the patriarch, who remarked, “there is no date on this deed.” R. Simeon Berabbi said to Rabbi, “It might be hidden between its folds.” On ripping the seams which held together the deed's folds, Rabbi saw the date. Then he turned around and looked at R. Simeon with displeasure. R. Simeon “I did not write it. R. Judah the Tailor wrote it.” Rabbi: Keep away from such slander.!”

Once again when he was sitting in Rabbi's presence , R. Simeon finished a section of the book of Psalms. Rabbi said, “How accurate this writing is!” R. Simeon “I did not write it. Judah the Tailor wrote it. Rabbi: Keep away from such slander!”

In the first instance one can well understand Rabbi's reproof since there was slander; but what slander was there in this instance?

The kind of slander spoken of by R. Dimi. For R. Dimi brother of R. Safra taught: A man should never speak in praise of his friend because out of praise of him he may bit by bit come to dispraise him.

Tanhuma B. Shelah 17

They....said: "We came unto the Land.... And surely it floweth with milk and honey... Howbeit the people Are fierce" (Num. 13:27-28). This is the way of those who deal in slander- they open with good things and end with evil ones.

B. Sotah 35a

R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Meir: A slanderous report that does not contain an element of truth in the beginning will not stand up in the end

Gen. R. 56:4; Yalkut Va-year 101

Even if a word of slander is not entirely effective, it will always be partly effective

B. Bava Batra 164b-165a

R. Amram said in the name of Rav: No man escapes – not even for one day- committing three transgressions: unchaste thought, insistence on God's immediate response to prayer, and slander. Slander you say? Yes, at the very least the fine dust (the overtones) of slander.

R. Judah said in the name of Rav: Most people are guilty of some cheating, a few of unchastity, but all of slander. Slander you say? Well, at least the fine dust the overtones of slander.

B. Ar. 15b-16a

Rabbah said: Whatever is said in the presence of the person concerned is not considered slander. Abbaye countered: All the more so- it is impudence as well as slander. Rabbah replied : I hold with R. Yose, who asserted, "I never said anything about a person that would make me look back to see if that person were standing behind me."

Rabbah bar R. huna stated : Repeating what a man said against himself in the presence of three others is not slander. Why not? Because your friend has a friend , and your friend's friend has a friend.

B. Yoma 4b

R. Measya grandson of R. Menasya said in the name of R. Measya the Elder: What is the proof that when a man says something of his friend the latter may not repeat it unless the man says, "you may go and say it": The verse "the Lord spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting, that he was to say (le'mor)... (Lev. 1:1)

B. Sanh. 29a

What is the proof that after a trial is over and one of the judges leaves the court, he may not say, "I was for acquittal but my colleagues were determined to convict. So what could I do since they were the majority?" Of such a leak, Scripture asserts, "He who revealeth that which is to remain secret is a talebearer (Prov. 11:13)

B. Shab 96b-97a

Our masters taught: The man gathering was Zelophehad. Thus it is said, ""And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks of wood upon the Sabbath day.... And they stoned him with stones, and he died" (Num 15:32 and 15:36); while elsewhere the daughters of Zelophehad said, "Our father died in the wilderness" (Num 27:3) . Just as in this instance Zelophehad is meant so too Zelophehad is meant earlier. Such was R. Akiva's opinion. But R. Judah ben Betera said to him, "Akiva in either case you will have to justify yourself: if you are right then you have revealed the identity of a man whom the torah shielded ; and if you are wrong, you are casting a stigma upon a righteous man."

Similarly you read, "and the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed (Num. 12:9). The verse teaches that Aaron too became leprous . Such was R.Akiva's opinion. But R. Judah ben Betera said to him, "Akiva in either case you will have to justify yourself for saying such a thing; if you are right, even though the torah shielded him, you have disclosed what happened ot Aaron; and if wrong you are casting a stigma upon a righteous man.

B. Sanhr. 31a

A story is told of a disciple about whom it was reported that after twenty-two years he disclosed a matter stated in the house of study (as a secret). So R. Ammi expelled him from the house of study, saying "this one discloses secrets."

B. Pesahim 49b

Ignorant men (amme ha-aretz) should not be told what is secret

Punishment of Tzoraat for speaking Loshon Ha-ra....

Remember what the L-rd thy G-d did unto Miriam

Midrash Rabbah Devarim

Remember what the L-rd thy God did unto Miriam . Halachah: If a man suffers from the plague of leprosy, is it permissible for a priest who is a near relative of his to examine him? The sages have taught thus (Neg. 2:5) . A man may examine anybody's plague of leprosy except his own. R. Meir said: Except also the plagues of his near relatives. And why do plagues come? Because of the evil eye (Lev. R17:3;

Num R. 7:5). R. Isaac said: It often happens that when a man says to his friend: 'Lend me your axe to cleave this tree with,' the latter out of selfishness replies: I have none; or if he even says to him: I implore you, lend me your sieve, although the latter has one he replies out of selfishness: I have none." Immediately then the plague attacks his house first. Whence this? For it is said, And he shall look on the plague and behold if the plague be in the walls of his house (Lev.14:37). And what was done to the house? They removed everything he had in the house. Whence this? For it is said, And the priest shall command that they empty the house. When everything he had in the house was removed his axes and his sieves people exclaimed, "See how selfish he is, he refused to lend anything he possessed! What has he to thank for this clearance? His own selfishness.

Another explanation: R. Hanina said: Plagues of leprosy come on account of nought save slander. The Rabbis say: A proof that the plagues come on account of slander can be derived from the case of the pious Miriam. Because she uttered slander against her brother Moses, plagues attacked her. Whence this? For it is said, Remember what the L-rd thy God did unto Miriam.

9. This bears out what scripture says, though sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slenderest thine own mother's son (Ps 50:20). R. Yochanan said: If you have accustomed your tongue to speak against your brother who is not of your own nation, in the end you will slander the son of your own nation. R. Judah b. Levy said: If you have accustomed your tongue to speak against your step-brother, who is of your father but not of your mother, in the end you will slander your own mother's son. For anyone who is so arrogant as to speak against one greater than himself causes the plagues to attack him. And if you do not believe tis, lo the pious Miriam is a warning to all slanderers. Hence the force of Remember what the L-rd Thy God did unto Miriam.

10. This bears out what Scripture says, Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt (Eccl. 5:5). The Rabbis say: This verse refers to slanderers. How is this implied in the verse? "Suffer not thy mouth.": when the mouth speaks slander, it sins against the body and makes it liable to receive lashes. Hence the force of "to bring thy flesh into guilt", for the mouth sins against the flesh. What is the force of "Neither say thou before the messenger, that it was an error. Do not say, "I will go and speak slander and no one will know it"; for God has said: Know that I will send an angel (i.e. a messenger) who will stand by your side and will write down everything you say against your friend. Whence this? For it is said, Curse not the king, no not in thy thought (10:20). Why? For a bird of the air shall carry the voice. And what is meant by, And that which hath wings shall reveal the matter.? These are the angels of whom it says, Each one had six wings (Isa. 6:2) . What is the meaning of, "Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice (Eccl. 5:5)? At the voice of the slanderer which issues from your mouth. And destroy the work of thy hands: for you will be punished with plagues. And should you not believe me, lo, Miriam, because she slandered was smitten with leprosy. Hence the force of Remember what the L-rd thy God did to Miriam, and because of loshon ha-rah was she punished

11 R. Isaac said: It was as if a snake was lying on the crossroads and biting everyone that passed by, when a keeper came and sat down facing it. A snake charmer came up and seeing the two of them, exclaimed the habit of the snake is to bite, I am surprised at the keeper that he associates with it. So

Mose said: Miriam spoke slander against me, [that I can understand] since women as a rule are talkative. But did Aaron the righteous also need to speak against me?' Moses said, "And Miriam spoke (Num 12:1), but surely not Aaron!' When, however, he discovered that Aaron had also spoken he began to lament, Yea, the man at peace with me, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me (Ps. 41:10). What is meant by, "Yea the man at peace with me? This refers to Aaron whose function was to bless me with peace, as it is said, And give thee peace (Num 6:26). "In whom I trusted: at the time when he stayed the Angel of Death. Whence this? For it is said, And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tent of meeting, and the plague was stayed (17:15). Who did eat of my bread: this refers to the twenty-four gifts of the priesthood which he received from Israel. And after all this praise, "He hath lifted up his heel against me, as it says, And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses.

R. Levi said: Women possess the four following characteristics: they are greedy, inquisitive, envious and indolent. Whence do we know that they are greedy? From what is written, And when the women saw that the tree was good for food, etc. (Gen 3:6). Whence do we know them to be inquisitive? For it is written, And Sarah heard in the tent door (18:10), that is, she was eavesdropping on the angel. Whence do we know that they are envious? For it is said, And Rachel envied her sister (30:1). Whence do we know that they are indolent? For it is written, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal (18:6). The rabbis add two more characteristics; they are querulous and gossips. Whence do we know that they are querulous? For it is written, and Sarai said unto Abram: My wrong be upon thee (16:5). And whence that they are gossips? For it is written, "and Miriam spoke."

Another explanation "And Miriam spoke". R. Joshua of Siknin said : Whe God was about to create Eve from Adam, He was considering whence to create her, as it is said, And the rib which the L-rd God had taken from the man, made He (wayyiben) woman, etc. (Gen. 2,22). God said I shall not create her from the eye, that her eye not be haughty, nor from the ear, that she may not be an eavesdropper, nor from the mouth, that she may not be talkative, nore from the hand, that she may not be a thief, nor from the foot that she may not be a gadabout; whence then shall I create her? From his most private limb, from the thigh." And yet it was of no avail. And everything that God intended should not be in her is to be found even in the best of women. God said:"I will not creat her from the eye that her eye may not be haughty, yet Eve it is written, "And when the woman saw, etc. (3:6); I will not create her from the ear that she may not e an eavesdropper, yet it is written, "And Sarah heard (18:10); I will not creat her from the hand that she may not be a thief, yet it is written, And Rachel stole the teraphim (31:19); I will not create her from the foot that she may not be a gadabout, yet Leah it is written, And Leah went out to meet him (30:16); I will not create her from the mouth that she may not be talkative, yet of Miriam the pious it is written, And Miriam spoke. And see what befell her. Remember what the L-rd thy God did unto Miriam.

Another comment: Remember. The Rabbis say, This can be compared to a King who returned in triumph from war, and a noble lady sang his praises, and the king decreed that she should be called the Mother of the Senate. Later she began to cause disorder in the royal headquarters. Said the king thereupon: Is that what she does? Let her be sent away to the mines. So when God waged war at the

Red Sea, Miriam chanted her song, and she was named prophetess, as it is said, And Miriam the prophetess.... Took (Ex. 15:20). When however she slandered her brother, God commanded that she should be sent to the mines as it is said, And Miriam was shut up (Num. 12:15).

13: Another comment: Remember. When Moses saw what befell his sister, he began to cry out and pray with all his heart and soul on her behalf as it is said, Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee (13). The rabbis say: Moses said Ribon Olam already long ago has thou granted me the power of healing, if Thou wilt heal her all is well; but if not, I will heal her.

Another explanation: What is the meaning of, "O God, I beseech thee? R. Abba b. Kahana said: This can be compared to a doctor's assistant who was consulted by a woman suffering from nausea, and he brought her to his teacher. Said the assistant to his master: Sir, you have already taught me the complete list of remedies; if you will heal her, all is well, but if not, I will cure her. Similarly Moses said "Master of the Universe, Thou hast long ago taught me the complete treatment for the plagues; if Thou wilt heal her, all is well; but if not I will cure her.

Another explanation: Moses cried unto the L-rd (Num 12:13). Moses can be compared to a warrior who once had a chain of punishment around his neck of which he was later freed. Subsequently he observed the chain placed on the neck of another, and he began to cry. On being asked, "Why do you cry? He replied, "You indeed do not know, but I know what suffering it causes lying there, for once the chain was on my neck and I know what pain it gave me." So, when Moses was crying, God asked him: Why do you cry? He answered : Master of the Universe, I know what pain my sister is suffering, for I remember the chain in which my hand was once placed. Whence this? As it is said, Behold his hand was leprous, as white as snow (Ex. 4:6). After Moses had prayed on her behalf, God healed her. Whence this? For it is said, And thy people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again (Num 12:15). Therefore be mindful of what befell Miriam because of slander.

14 Another explanation: R. Assi said: One does not speak slander until he denies God, as it is said Who have said: Our tongue will make mighty our lips are with us, who is lord over us (Ps. 12:15). R. Simeon said: If this befell Miriam the pious who had no intention to slander Moses, but only criticized him because of his neglect of his marital duty (Deut. R. 5:6), how much more so will the wicked who deliberately slander their brethren in order to cut short their lives, have their own tongues cut off by God, as it is said, May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, etc. God said: In this world, because there are amongst you slanderers, I have withdrawn My divine presence from amongst you as it is said, Be Thou exalted O God, above the heavens (Ps. 57:12). But in the time to come, when I will uproot the Evil inclination from amongst you, as it is said And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh (Ezek. 36:26), I will restore my divine presence amongst you. Whence this? For it is said, And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh (Joel 3:1); and because I will cause my divine presence to rest upon you, all of you will merit the torah, and you will dwell in peace in the world, as it is said, And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children (Isa54:13).

Rashi שלמה יצחקי; 22 February 1040 – 13 July 1105

Remember what the L-rd thy G-d did unto Miriam- if you wish to guard yourself against being stricken with leprosy do not speak slander! Remember what was done unto Miriam who spoke slander against her brother and was stricken with a leprous plague! (Siphre).

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra [1092/93 – 1167]

Unto Miriam. Here is proof of the midrashic statement that we should not read the word metzora as metzora (a leper) but as an acronym for motzi shem ra (one who invents libel)

Rambam [1134-1204]

Remember what Hashem your God did to Miriam on the way. Consider what happened to the prophetess Miriam, who spoke against her brother. She was older than he and raised him on her knees. She had risked her life to save his. She did not say anything bad about him; she merely made a mistake in equating him to the other prophets. He personally did not mind at all, as the man Moses was anuv mo'od (very humble), yet all the same she was immediately punished with tzaraas. How much more so then will the wicked foolish people who speak abundant exaggerated tales and loshon ha-ra be punished (Tum'as Tzaraas, ch. 16)

Rabbeinu Bachya (רבינו בחיי, 1340 – 1255)

“keep remembering what the L-rd your g-d did to Miriam. This is a positive commandment related to the negative commandment not to speak evil about people. We are not only to remember that Miriam badmouthed her brother Moses but the punishment that she endured on account of that. It is mentioned here as her punishment was to become afflicted with skin disease tzoraat. Seeing that the previous verse had commenced with the word hashomer, something which always introduces a negative commandment, I might have thought that this too is a negative commandment. The Torah teaches that although this was a negative commandment which was a direct derivative of a positive commandment and is usually not viewed with the severity of an ordinary negative commandment, the reason that miriam's punishment is recalled here is to remind us how serious the sin of loshon ha-ra is considered in the eyes of the Torah.

Consider that if righteous Miriam, the prophetess, who only spoke against her brother, who was older than he, and for whom she had put her life at risk and had said what she said without his ever hearing it was punished with the dread disease of tzoraat, and all her accumulated merits did not protect her against this punishment, how much more reason do we normal mortals have to be circumspect and not become guilty of the sin of lashon ha-ra. Consider further that Miriam had not really said something negative about Moses except that she had compared her and Aaron's prophetic stature to that of her brother Moses.

In view of all these considerations it is easy to understand why the Torah looks askance at any assembly of fools, loiterers, people engaged in pointless and unproductive conversation. Solomon makes this plain in Kohlet 8,2 when he said that foolishness is the result of too much talk. Such talk will easily degenerate into sinful talk, character-assassination of one's peers and the like. Once one has begun to speak disparagingly about one's peers it is only a short step away from criticizing Torah scholars as we know from Psalms 31,19: "let lying lips be stilled that speak haughtily against the righteous with arrogance and contempt." Once one is not afraid to speak about the righteous, one will start putting down G-d's prophets, and in the end one will speak out against God Himself. We have examples of all this in 2 Chronicles 36:15: 'but they mocked the messengers of God and disdained His words and taunted his prophets until the wrath of God against His people grew beyond remedy.'" Compare also Psalms 73:9: "They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth." Who was the cause that they set their mouths against heaven? Their tongues which had begun by speaking about earthly matters.

Ramban Nahmanides (1194–c. 1270)

Zakor... If you wish to be careful to avoid being afflicted with tzaraas do not speak evil speech. But in my opinion it is a full fledged positive commandment not just advice, comparable to other phrases in Scripture that begin with the word "zakor", remember, such as Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it (Ex. 20:8) Remember this day on which you departed from Egypt (Ex. 13:3) and Remember what Amalek did to you (25:17)- those are all commandments rather than advice and if so this verse is also a commandment like those are. And the commandment is thus an admonition against speaking evil speech. Scripture is commanding with the force of a positive commandment that we should remember the great punishment that G-d meted out to the righteous prophetess Miriam, who had spoken improperly only about her bother, the recipient of her kindness who she loved like her own self. Moreover she did not speak in his presence, that he should have been embarrassed, nor did she speak in public- rather, she spoke only in private, between her and her saintly brother Aaron. Nevertheless all her good deeds were of no avail to her in avoiding punishment. You too Scripture is saying here if "you sit and speak against your brother, you slander your mother's son," you will not be spared punishment.... Guard yourself against the tzaraas affliction to be very careful and to act then safeguarding in the heart ie. Maintaining a mental awareness has already been said.

The Tur, Rabbi Yakov ben Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh) (Colonia, 1269 – Toledo, 1343)

"keep remembering what the Lord your God had done to Miriam. Rashi understands this as a veiled warning that if we do not want to be struck with the affliction of tzaraat, we must remember how Miriam was punished for badmouthing her brother Moses.

Nachmanides writes that in his opinion this verse is a positive commandment ranking parallel to the fourth commandment of the ten commandments "zakor et yom ha-shabbat likadsho", keep remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy. There are other such verses such as to remember the day

we left Egypt as a free nation (Ex. 13,3) or at the end of this portion, “remember what Amalek did to you, etc.” (Deut. 25, 17) This is the Torah’s way of underlining the grave sin of badmouthing people by adding a positive commandment to the negative commandment. The positive commandment is to constantly remember how even the illustrious Miriam, Moses’ lifesaver in a certain manner, was punished for saying a few words criticizing him unjustly. She had not done so publicly, and yet all her numerous merits did not protect her against being punished, and that punishment being very public, the whole nation having to wait a whole week before they could move on. It is not enough to remember what happened to Miriam only in one’s heart, but we are required to read the relevant verses with our lips to impress the importance of the problem of badmouthing people. In the last verse the Torah warned us to be extremely careful in matters of the affliction called tzoraat, i.e. in that verse we were warned to remember what that affliction is for in our hearts and minds. Now the Torah reinforces this commandment by ordering us to voice the fact that we have committed this lesson to memory. Seeing that in the eyes of our sages the sin of loshon ha-rah, badmouthing people is equated with the spilling of innocent blood (Compare Erchin 15) it is not surprising therefore that the Torah reinforces it. It is quite inconceivable that such a grievous sin should not have been spelled out in the Torah. We therefore regard what is written in verse 8 and verse 9 as a severe warning not to become guilty of such a sin either in public or even in private. The sin is not lessened if the intent of the criticism was not to harm the good reputation of the party discussed [Miriam’s criticism was in defense of her sister-in-law Tziporah whom Moses had divorced for no good cause, as she had thought] loshon ha-ra is part of the roster of the 613 commandments, no less so than not to violate the Sabbath.

Rashbam (Troyes, c. 1085 – c. 1158)

Even if the person smitten with tzorat is a king, as Uzziah King of Yehudah, he will not be given preferential treatment and has to be ostracized and isolated just any commoner afflicted with the same disease

For you are to remember what happened to Miriam, certainly a highly placed person, who in spite of being a prophetess and leader of all the Israelite women and Moses’ own sister, was not accorded preferential treatment in this regard. She was segregated for seven days, as we know from Num. 12:14

Even though segregating her at that time meant that the whole nation would have to remain in an inhospitable desert for an extra seven days, the people did not complain about this. Other, less distinguished people will certainly not be treated better than was Miriam if they should become afflicted in a similar manner.

Rabbi Isaac ben Moses Arama (c. 1420 – 1494) in sefer Akedat Yitzchak

The Torah next turns its attention to matters one is likely to encounter when already somewhat older, and less active. Retirement and ensuing boredom may lead to gossiping, the penalty for which is Tzoraat

(Erchin 15). The Torah itself offers Miriam and her punishment as an example, so no further comment is needed

Rabbi Abraham Abele Gombiner (אברהם אבלי הלוי גומבינר) (c. 1635 – 5 Oct. 1682), Magen Avraham

Remember what Hashem your God did to Miriam. Rashi brings out the connection between tzaraas and loshon ha-ra, malicious gossip. He suggests that if we want to keep from being smitten with tzaraas we should not speak badly about another person. We should remember what was done to Miriam- she spoke against her brother and was smitten with tzaraas.

Ramban observes that Miriam who was both a prophetess and righteous person loved her brother and uttered her words solely to her brother Aaron and only very discreetly. Nevertheless she was severely punished and her good deeds were not able to protect her. We are reminded that if such a thing happened to a person as great as Miriam under the aforementioned circumstances then how much greater must the punishment be for those who speak badly about others under less favorable circumstances.

Ramban also holds that here the word zakar, remember, signifies a command from Hashem to regularly repeat this warning aloud, whereas if it had said shamor, take heed, it would have indicated a non-verbalized remembrance. Accordingly the remembrance of Miriam is included in the Six Remembrances that are recited daily after the morning prayer (following Ari). However some Sages advise against reciting the verse concerning Miriam because it recalls a shame for Jews. (Magen Avraham ch. 60)

Me'am Loez 1730-1777. (Hebrew: מעם לועז), initiated by Rabbi Yaakov Culi in 1730

Remember what God did to Miriam on your way out of Egypt. Numbers ch. 12 described Miriam's "speaking against Moses" and her punishment. By recalling that episode here, the Torah emphasizes that leprosy is a punishment for lashon ha-rah, slander and gossip (Sifri)

See how careful we must be with our speech! Miriam did not embarrass Moses in public. She had his best interests in mind, and thought God would approve of her statements. Yet she was punished. Surely one who slanders a fellow-Jew in public should take heed (Sifrei). Our sages declared "loshon ha-rah can be equated to murder".

According to Ramban this directive is one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. We must recall the seriousness of the prohibition against loshon ha-rah and guard ourselves against speaking in this manner at all times. (see Ramban Hasagot to Sefer HaMitzvot positive commandments no.7)

None of the other sages who compiled a list of mitzvot included this admonition. Nevertheless in many communities it is customary to recite this verse each day in accordance with Ramban's opinion.

Ohr Hachayim born Meknes, Morocco, in 1696; passed on in Jerusalem, Palestine on July 7, 1743.

Take heed of the affliction known as Tzoraat. According to Shabbat 132 on our verse the meaning is that a person afflicted with this plague must not remove the afflicted section of his skin in order to remove the evidence of his disease. The reason why the Torah added that we should remember what God had done to Miriam is intended to remind us of the true source of such an affliction and to remind those who think they can cure it by cutting off the skin where it appears that they are on the wrong track. The way to get rid of this affliction is to remove its cause, i.e. to rehabilitate a character fault which caused it in the first place.

Tzror Hamor, Rabbi Abraham Saba (Castille 1440–1508)

“If someone is found to have kidnapped a fellow Jew” we must understand this in terms of what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 2:16 while using the metaphor of certain women as being the arch types of the evil urge, “her words are so smooth that they cause the listener to slide into an abyss.” Our author continues in this vein, seeing Moses in our chapter issued warnings against the danger of falling victim to the seductive ways of the evil urge. The evil urge, Satan, “kidnaps” one’s whole personality, nefesh. Satan’s methods are a combination of slandering God (Ps. 73:9) by pointing of what appear like injustices committed by God and defaming people of good character. When the Torah commenced the chapter of people afflicted with the medically incurable skin disease, tzoraat, the Torah (Lev. 14:1) introduced the subject with the words “Zot torah ha metzoraat”. The word metzora sounds as if it were an abbreviation of Hamotzi shem rah, “he who defames someone, etc.” This is why the Talmud (Erchin 15) says that the Torah here writes “hashomer binega hatzora” be especially on guard against the affliction known as “tzoraat.” The evil urge is also known as nega tzoraat as it attacks people in a manner reminiscent of seductive tactics employed by Satan. The call by the Torah to remember what happened to Miriam who had made inappropriate comments about her brother Moses’ (who claimed war on the yetzrah hara in separating from his wife) divorcing his wife, is inserted at this stage to show how even well meant criticism, uttered only in a private conversation with her brother Aaron, was severely punished by G-d by Miriam being afflicted with the skin disease known as tzorat (v.9).

Rabbi S.R. Hirsh (June 20, 1808 – December 31, 1888) Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Zakor. The warning to keep in mind what happened to Miriam the prophetess who because of a conversation just between herself and Aaron concerning their brother Moses, a conversation which was not free from defamatory talk and conceit was marked by G-d’s finger with a nega in consequence of which she was shut out of the company of the whole nation for seven days- this warning proclaims loudly and clearly for all time the purely spiritual meaning of betterment from all social faults and misdemeanors, it also reminds of the gravity of the responsibility for every word which borders on loshon ha-ra which could not be overlooked even in a Miriam, which according to the way it is taken was not even said in a bad way with any bad intention; and finally it reminds us of the importance of carrying out the regulatin of negaim, seeing that for their sake the whole nation had to break its journey to the promised homeland for seven days, as the reference here adds , bederekh bitzeatikem mimizraim.

Shem Mishmuel, Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain, the 2nd Sochatchover Rebbe, between the years 1910-1926

The nature of speech and Klal Yisrael's use of it. We quoted Rabbeinu Yonah who indicated that if one "guards" one's mouth, then it may be considered a holy vessel, capable of sanctifying its speech. This is hard to understand in the light of the fact that God has created us to praise Him. Surely this task should be sufficient to imbue one's mouth with holiness; why does one need to guard it to ensure its sanctity? Rabbeinu Yona implies that without care our mouths will not be capable of instilling holiness into our speech. A most unusual Chazal clarifies this matter in Yerushalmi Berachos 1:2

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "Had I been at Mount Sinai at the moment when the Torah was given to Yisrael I would have demanded that man should have been created with two mouths- one for Torah and prayer and other for mundane matters. But then I retracted and exclaimed that if we fail and speak lashon hara with only one mouth, how much more so would we fail with two mouths

The concern expressed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was that after something has been defiled it remains in that state, until some drastic action is taken to reverse or renew its sanctity. He realized that if the mouth is misused for lashon hara or other verbal sins, then it is defiled and loses its status of holiness, which cannot then be recovered. If, he reasoned we have only one mouth and we use it wrongly there is no way back- we will never be able to use it for holy purposes again. The mouth will remain defiled and any Torah or prayers which are uttered from it will not be sanctified in the appropriate manner. His proposed solution was two mouths for each person, one of which would be reserved just for Torah matter. In that way even if the secular mouth were to be defiled the Torah mouth would retain its ability to sanctify speech. But Rabbi Shimon realized the impracticality of this suggestion, for the inevitable would occur. In a short while, both mouths would be defiled achieving nothing.

We now understand Rabbeinu Yona's imperative. Only a person who guards his mouth will merit to sanctify speech. Without this precondition the mouth fails to achieve its potential as a holy vessel and therefore cannot produce holy speech. Of course when we err, we may always do teshuva and begin the process again. Let us hope that we merit to utilize our own mouths and the speech which they produce to ennoble and sanctify the world around us.

Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin, Grand Rabbi of Kerestir in Borough Park, Brooklyn

24:8 Be careful regarding the affliction of tzara'as

Rashi explains that his admonition is fulfilled by not obscuring the signs of tzara'as and by not removing the blister that appears on the skin. According to the Sifrei, the prohibition of breaking the blister also applies to those signs of tzara'as which a Kohen rules is pure. The basis for this ruling is difficult to understand. If the blister is ruled pure, why should there be any reason to forbid breaking it?

Rav Yitzchak Meir of Gur comments that according to the Zohar (parasha Tazria) signs of tzara'as appear because of lashon ha-ra as well as because of speech that should have been said but which was mistakenly withheld. One may not remove the blister which a Kohen ruled pure, for it is punishment for refraining from saying that which should have been said

Ohr ha-Chaim points out that the law which Rashi notes pertains to the removing of the blister that appears along the tzara'as is juxtaposed to the Torah's command that we remember what happened to Miriam when she spoke lashon ha-ra about Moshe. This teaches us that we must uproot the causes of the affliction- sin. If we remove only the exterior sign of the sin we have accomplished nothing.

Meshech Chochmah points out that from what happened in the case of Miriam, we derive the prohibition of not removing the blister. Had there been no prohibition Miriam's blister could have been removed and the entire nation would not have had to wait for seven days until it disappeared.

The Midrash comments that Moshe told God: "If you cure her of her tza'ra'as, good. And if not I shall cure her." Rav Sofer offers the following explanation to help us understand what Moshe was saying. The Talmud (Yoma 85b) teaches that in regard to sins against God, teshuvah is efficacious. But as regards sin against our fellow man, teshuvah is effective only if the guilty party first pacifies the person whom he has offended and the offended one forgives him.

Moshe was unsure whether Miriam's sin of lashon ha-ra was considered an offense against God or an offense against him. He therefore declared: If you cure her, then good- i.e. hers was a sin against God and her teshuvah is sufficient. However if Miriam's wrong was considered to be a sin against me, then I shall cure her i.e. I forgive her and her teshuvah will be efficacious.

REFINED PROPER SPEECH and PROHIBITION OF LASCIVIOUS TALK

B. Pesachim 3a

The sages in the school of R. Ishmael taught: A man should always use refined speech: "Thou shalt choose the tongue of the subtle" (Iyov 15:5); That which my lips know they shall speak in purity (Iyov 33:3)

B. Pesachim 3a

R. Joshua ben Levy said: A man should never let unseemly words issue from his mouth. Thus, speaking in a roundabout way, Scripture added eight letters in order to avoid uttering an unseemly term, as in the verse "Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean (Gen. 7:8). R. Papa said: Even nine letters, as in the verse "If there be among you any man that is not clean by reason of that which chanceth him by night (Deut. 23:11)

B. Pesachim 3b

Two disciples sat before Hillel. One was Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai- others say it was before Rabbi Judah I the patriarch) and that one was R. Yochanan. The second of two disciples asked, "Why must we vintage grapes in vessels that are clean, yet may gather olives in vessels that are unclean?". The first

asked the same question without using the objectionable term unclean: “Why must we vintage grapes in vessels that are clean, but need not gather olives in vessels that are clean?” Their teacher said, “I am certain that this one is [pointing to the first disciple] will be an authorized teacher in Israel.” It did not take long before he was indeed an authorized teacher in Israel.

There were three priests. One said, “I received as much as a bean (of the showbread) ; the second said “I received as much as an olive”; while the third said “I received as much as a lizard’s tail.” The lineage of the third priest was investigated and a disqualification was found in it.

B. Pesachim 3b

Two disciples sat before Rav. One said, “You made the subject as savory for us as a stuffed pig.” The other said, “Your analysis has made me as tired as a kid out of breath.” Rav would not speak to the first disciple after that.

B.Sanh. 68b

The sages used only genteel language

B. Shab. 33a

In punishment for obscene speech, troubles multiply, cruel decrees are proclaimed anew, the young men of Israel- may such things happen to their enemies- die, and the fatherless and widows cry out and receive no answer. For it is said, “Therefore the L-rd shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall He have compassion on their fatherless and widows; for everyone is profane and an evildoer, and ever mouth speaketh obscenity . For all His Anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still (Isa 9:16)

B.Shab. 33a

R. Hanan bar Rava said: All know why a bride enters the bridal chamber (yichud), yet when a man speaks obscenely of it, even if a decree of seventy years happiness had been sealed for him, it is reversed into seventy years of misery.

Rabbah bar Shila said in R. Hisda’s name: When a man fous his mouth with obscenity, Gehenna is made deeper for him, as is said, “A deep pit is for the mouth that speaketh obscenity (Mishlei 22:14). R.

Nahman bar Isaac said: Also for him who hears it and remains silent.

B. Kettubot 5b

Our masters taught: A man should not allow his ears to listen to chitchat, because being delicate they are, of all parts of the body, the first to catch fire.

B.Kettubot 5a-b

Bar Kappara expounded: What is meant by “And thou shalt have a plug among thy weapons (Deut. 23:14)? Read not *aznekha*, “thy weapons” but *oznekha*, “thine ear”, meaning that when a man hears something unseemly, he must place his fingers into his ears. This counsel is in keeping with what R. Eleazar said: Why do a man’s fingers resemble plugs? In order to suggest that when a man hears something unseemly, he should plug his ears with his fingers.

The sages taught in the school of R. Ishmael: Why is the entire ear hard and the lobe soft? In order that when a man is about to hear something unseemly, he can plug his ear with the lobe.

Derekh Eretz Rabbah 3

R. Eliezer ben Jacob said: When a handsome and distinguished man allows an unseemly word to issue from his mouth, what is he like? A large (and well-appointed) dining hall with a tanner’s ill smelling drainpipe running through the middle

B. Pesachaim 3b and En Yaakov ad loc.

When R. Kahana fell ill, the sages sent R. Joshua son of R. Idi to find out how he was doing. When he came in and found that R. Kahana had died, he rent his garment but reversed it as he went out weeping, so that the rent part would not be noticed. When he came back to the sages, they asked him, “Is he dead?”. R. Joshua: “it was you who said it. I did not say it, for he that uttereth evil tidings is a fool” (Prov. 10:18)

B. Pesachim 4b

Rav was the son of R. Hiyya’s brother and the son of R. Hiyya’s sister. When Rav came up to the land of Israel, R. Hiyya asked him, “Is your father still alive?” Rav replied “You might ask, “Is mother still alive?”. Well is your mother still alive?”. R. Hiyya asked. Rav replied “Is Father still alive?”. At that R. Hiyya said to his attendant, “Take off my shoes but carry my bathing gear after me to the bathhouse.”

B. Pesachim 3b

Yochanan of Hukok went around visiting villages. When he came back, people asked, “Is the wheat crop doing well?” He replied “The barley crop is doing well” So the people retorted, “Go proclaim the good news to horse and donkeys” What should he have said? “last year the wheat crop did well,” or “the lentil crop is doing well.”

[i.e. since only animals eat barley and since wheat and lentils are eaten by humans, Yochanan should have spoken encouragingly about them.]

P. Berachot 9:8 14d

All chitchat is bad, except chitchat about Torah which is good

Leviticus Rabbah 33:1

R. Simeon ben Gamaliel said to his slave Tabi, "Go to the market and buy me a good piece of meat." So Tabi went out and bought him a tongue. Later, R. Simeon said to Tabi, "Go out and buy me a bad piece of meat at the market." Tabi went out and again bought him a tongue. R. Simeon ben Gamaliel asked him, "why when I asked you to buy me a good piece of meat, did you buy a tongue, and when I asked you to buy a bad piece of meat, did you again buy a tongue? Tabi replied, "Because from the tongue comes good, and from it comes also evil. When it is good nothing is better than it; and when it is bad, nothing is more evil than it.

Leviticus Rabbah 33:7

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). Akila the Translator defined the tongue as a tool having a knife at one end and a spoon at the other- death at one end and life at the other. Even so Ben Sira said, "blow on a coal to make it glow, or spit on it to put it out; both results come from the same mouth (Ecclesiasticus 28:12)

B. Ar. 15b

Rava said : He who wishes to live can acquire life through his tongue; he who wishes to die can find death through his tongue.

Megillah 13a-13b, Haman's Slander

Haman said, "there is (yeshno) one people" (Esther 3:8). Rava commented: There never was a slanderer as skillful as Haman. Haman said to Ahasuerus, "Come let us engage them in battle." Ahasuerus answered, "I am afraid." Their G-d punishes anyone who engages them in battle." Haman: "But they are negligent (yashenu) of G-d's precepts." Ahasuerus: Nevertheless, there are righteous men in Israel who will seek mercy for the transgressors." Haman: "But they are "one people" . Should you argue that by obliterating them I will make a barren area in your kingdom, please remember that they are scattered- scattered among many peoples. Should you say, "but surely there is some benefit to be derived from them, "remember that they are meforad (dispersed)- they are like a firdah (mule), a mule that bears no progeny. Should you argue, "but they are outside my domain," and so you cannot act against them, they are "in all the provinces of thy kingdom.

Besides their laws are diverse from those of every people (Esther 3:8)- they do not eat with us, drink with us, or intermarry with us. Neither keep they the king's laws- they spend their entire year dawdling and lolling about (shihi pihi i.e. Shabbat ha-yom, Pesah ha-yom). They say, "It is Sabbath, it is a festival," and thus get out of doing the king's work." Haman then proceeded to reckon the Jewish festivals: The feast of unleavened bread, feast of weeks, feast of tabernacles, New year's day, and the fast of atonement. At that, the Holy One said to Haman, "Villain you would cast an evil eye upon their festivals? I will cause you to fall down before them, and to celebrate your downfall they will add still another festival."

Haman went on, "It profiteth not the king to suffer them " (Esther 3:8), for they eat and drink, and hold the king in contempt. If a fly falls into the cup of one of them, he flings it out and drinks the wine. But if my lord king touches the cup of one of them, he dashes it to the ground and will not drink from it. Therefore "if it please the king, let it be written that they destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver," etc. (Esther 3:9).

"And the king said unto Haman: "The silver is given thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee" (Esther 3:11). R. Abba said, "By what may the give-and-take between Ahasuerus and Haman be illustrated? By the parable of two men, one of whom had a mound in the middle of his field, while the other had a ditch in the middle of his. The owner of the mound said: Who will sell me the ditch? The owner of the ditch said: Who will sell me the mound? One day the two met, and the owner of the ditch said to the owner of the mound: Sell me your mound. The other replied: I wish that such a request had been made long ago! Take it for nothing.

Esther Rabbah 7:3

The scribes of this despicable and arrogant people are notorious ingrates. Look what they did to poor Pharaoh. When their forebears came down to Egypt, he welcomed them with extraordinary kindness- he even allowed them to settle in the very best part of his land. During years of famine he did not merely feed them, he gave them choice viands. Then, when he asked that they should build him just one palace, they came with a trumped up tale, saying, " let us go-, pray thee, 3 days journey into the wilderness and sacrifice unto the Lord our G-d (Ex. 5:3), after that we will come back. In the meantime- they said- please lend us silver vessels, gold vessels, and garments. So the Egyptians lent them their silver, their gold and their finest clothing. Then each one of these ingrates loaded ever so many asses, until they emptied Egypt. After that they made their getaway. Naturally, Pharaoh- he and his entire camp- had no choice but to pursue them to retrieve their stolen treasure. What did these ingrates do? They had among them a certain person whose name was Moses son of Amram. By means of his witchcraft he took a staff, uttered incantations over it, and with it smote the sea, until it became dry. Then all of them went into the midst of the sea on dry land, and all of them got across. I do not know by what means they were able to cross the sea or by what means its waters were dried up. When Pharaoh saw this, he went in after them- I do not know how they managed to push him into the sea- but he and his entire host drowned in it. The ingrates, you see chose not to remember the good things Pharaoh had done for them.

Then do you know what they did to Amalek. Haman's ancestor? After they had come up out of the sea, Amalek went to Balaam to seek advice from him, saying: Look what this people has done to Egypt. Now, if they have done this to Egypt, which bestowed so many boons upon them, how much more are they likely to do to other peoples! What do you advise? Balaam replied: Go and wage war against them. If you cannot prevail against them, no mortal will ever prevail against them, because they depend on the merit of Abraham and so do you.

At that Amalek, went to war against them. What did their leader Moses do then? He had an understudy named Joshua son of Nun, cruel- utterly without mercy. Moses said to him, "Choose us men and go out fight with Amalek (Ex. 17:9). I do not know the kind of men he chose- whether they were wizards or just mighty warriors. But Moses took a stick in his hand- I do not know precisely what he did with it- and also took a stone and sat on it- again I do not know what incantations he whispered over it. All I know is that Amalek's strength grew weak; and powerless they fell slain by them.

Then they attacked Sihon and Og, the mightiest warriors in the world. No mortal could stand up to these two. I still do not know how they managed to slay them.

After that what did Joshua that person's understudy, do? He led Israel into the land of the Canaanites, not only taking their land, but slaying 31 of their kings. He then divided the land of the Canaanites among the Israelites. Even the Gibeonites, who made peace with them, they forced to become menservants and maidservants. Then Sisera and his multitude attacked Israel. What they did to him, I do not know, but the brook of Kishon swept away Sisera and his multitude carried them off, and cast them into the Great Mediterranean Sea.

As their first King they had a man named Saul. He went to the land of Haman's ancestor Amalek, where in one day Saul slew a hundred thousand horsemen- he had no pity on man or woman, child or suckling. How he managed to slay them I do not know. Then what did they do to Haman's grandfather Agag, whom they first had spared? After a while one of them, named Samuel, came forth, cut him in pieces, and served his flesh as food to the birds of heaven. I do not know why Samuel felt he had to inflict such horrible death upon Agag.

After that they had another King, David son of Jesse by name, who destroyed and exterminated ever so many realms, and showed no pity to their inhabitants.

After David, his son Solomon rose up and built for Israel an edifice he called "the sacred house." What they had in it, I do not know. But whenever enemies came to fight them, they entered that edifice and performed their witchcraft in it, and when they emerged from it, they killed enough to destroy the entire world. There was not a virtue they did not boast of having, and because of their extraordinary prosperity, no other people or tongue was deemed by them to amount to anything