

Shhh - It's A Secret!

Dear Parents,

Much of life and *Yiddishkeit* consists of balancing conflicting values and attempting to come out on the right side of what *Hashem* wants us to do in any situation. Sharing private information and revealing secrets is an area that presents one of the most challenging scenarios for adults and children. **The imperative of confidentiality frequently collides with the need for information to help someone.** Which way to go is indeed a thorny question.

At the very beginning of this week's *Parsha* and of the entire *Sefer Vayikra*, the *pasuk* (*Vayikra* 1:1) says: *And Hashem called to Moshe, and He spoke to him from the Ohel Moed, saying.* The next *Pasuk* then continues to *Hashem's* words and begins: *Speak to the Bnei Yisroel...* The *Gemora* in *Yoma* (4B) is troubled by the inclusion of the word *לאמר* saying at the end of the first *Pasuk*. The Torah seemingly should only have said: *And Hashem called to Moshe from the Ohel Moed.* Next *Pasuk* then states - *Speak to the Bnei Yisroel.* What does "saying" add to the point of the *Pasuk*, if immediately afterwards *Hashem* openly tells *Moshe* to speak?

The *Gemora*, as explained by *Rashi*, says to read the word *לאמר*, saying, as *לא אמור* making the word in fact a contraction "do not say." *Rashi's* explanation is that the word *לאמר* really is not needed in the *Pasuk* for its simple meaning, it is in fact coming to teach something else. That is - *Derech Eretz*, proper behavior. In this case it is "Don't Say." *Moshe Rabbeinu* was being told not to reveal the words of *Hashem* - "don't say" until he received permission to "Speak to the Bnei Yisroel."

When it comes to private information, it is not proper to share it with others. If the person sharing with you tells you directly that it is a secret, not to reveal it, then we are commanded to not reveal it. **A basic truism in human relations is that people are drawn to each other when there is a feeling of trust between them.** If one feels the other is possibly or likely to share a private conversation, that relationship will never develop into anything deep or meaningful. Even information that is not potentially harmful or painful and would not qualify as *Lashon Hara*, should nevertheless not be shared without permission.

When it comes to the parent-child relationship, as it relates to information that is private or secret, the guidelines become extremely complex. Many things take place in the confines of one's home that should not be shared outside of the family. Many things take place outside of the home, that family members feel comfortable sharing with each other, perhaps inappropriately. Young children don't yet know how to keep a secret and they need to be taught that by their parents through words and role modeling. On the flip side, parents need to know what is going on in their child's life to keep him or her safe - physically, spiritually and emotionally.

To properly navigate this balancing act, parents need to understand the parameters of *Toeles* - which means "a positive purpose or benefit." There are circumstances when secrets need to be revealed and *Lashon Hara* must be said, in order to protect someone from harm. When it comes to sharing information about children, many of us adults are not sufficiently careful to speak only in cases of *Toeles*. On the other hand, many parents and teachers have been almost too effective in teaching their children and students about *Lashon Hara*, and children then don't share vital information with a trusted adult, that is needed to prevent harm from coming to them or someone else.

There are no shortcuts in navigating this vitally important area of *Halacha* and interpersonal relations. Knowledge of *Hilchos Loshon Hara*, adopting an overall approach to not sharing confidential information with others, and gently, carefully and consistently explaining to one's children what information should and should not be shared and with whom, are keys to properly train our children. Helping them habituate behavior in accordance with *Halacha* will not only build their *Avodas Hashem*, it will enable them to build and maintain trusting, deep and meaningful, long-lasting relationships in their lives.

Have a wonderful *Shabbos* and a *Freilichen Purim*,



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