



In the Footsteps of our Fathers
MY OTHER HAT IS A CAP
Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita
Perek 1 Mishna 9

I own a baseball cap, there, that's one admission out of the way. I own this cap not because I play that American pastime, nor even that I am vaguely interested in it; no, I have that cap because of its message. This cap comes to me via Yerushalayim, a wonderful place that is, however, not known for its sporting vigour. In fact, this symbol of America's greatest pastime was made in Meoh She'orim, a spot that could not be further from the American dream of baseball and lazy summer days. So, what draws me to this cap? It's all about what is written on it. In gold letters on a black background, it says the following.... "Just tell me and I will tell you if it's Loshon Horah!" These words will bring a smile to the lips of all Torah Yidden. We all can relate to them, and sadly need constant reminding of what Loshon Horah can do. I keep this odd rabbinical hat in my shul office, and every once and while if someone starts to get a bit too busy about others' affairs, I place it on my head as a reminder.

The wonder of it all is that we all know we shouldn't speak Loshon Horah, and yet, there it is, even the baseball caps know it!

I have been thinking a lot about this recently; certain events have focused my mind on it. It's summer time and with it Loshon Horah seems to be rampant. It's that time of year when children are moving schools, where many shiduchim are spoken of, and families come together on holiday. All these ingredients are ripe for the old evil concoction to come to the fore. With so much to talk about, so many secrets to share, and so much to be judgmental about., the sulphuric acrid stench of evil talk can become toxic.

Yes, we are all judges, sitting in the most difficult court in all creation, the courtroom of the mind. We shape our opinions by what we allow ourselves to believe, and in this way create a reality that seems to make sense in our hearts. The fact is that much of what we hear is Loshon Horah, and that we become complacent about the horror that such wickedness can bring. Let's look at the relevant mishna in this week's perek for a moment:

"Be diligent in examining the witnesses; and be careful with your words, lest from them they learn to falsify."

In your mind, that place where you really live, things are presented to

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you. You hear stories, are shown proofs and you decide what opinion you hold. Guta Yiden explain that the Yeitzer Tov and the Yeitzer Horah vie against each other, trying to gain the upper hand., and that this eternal battle is what the mishna eludes to.

“Be diligent in examining the witnesses” means think about who the conveyor of the juicy titbit is. There are all too many of us who find that their own insecurities are such that they must talk about others. Being in a position to know others 'secrets gives them power, and in their own perverse way they think themselves more important. Do you want to be part of that local power complex? Is what is said a correct rendering of information, or is what they say tainted by small mindedness? In this world where so much information is thrown about, a good judge examines the provenance of each detail. I have seen homes destroyed, hearts broken by the words of mean little people who are trying to control others. In fact, we have all seen this, but we become intimidated by the power of their mean spiritedness and shy away from calling out the purveyors of all this junk talk.

“Be careful with your words, lest from them they learn to falsify.”

The Mishna tells us that no matter what we think, we should be wary when we speak. Our words can be appropriated and then misused, again by others with their own dark agendas. They will falsify what you say, and add to the mountain of oppression they have created.

The reader will think me perhaps a bit too overwrought on this subject. Truth is: I am, and angry to boot! Too many people are being hurt, and no one stands up for them. Good wholesome and sweet Yidden find themselves the victims of the worst type of slander, and they can do nothing to save themselves. We are gripped by a sense of disability, and we just pray that we never fall foul of the slanderers. Everyone knows about such circumstances, and we all wait for someone else to come to the rescue.

Well, that's not good enough, is it? So, let's at least just start with ourselves. Check who says what to you, think why this person is getting involved with others 'lives, and watch that you don't add to the blazing uncontrollable fire with your own words. We can starve the evil of oxygen if we but look into ourselves. You are the judge of what you decide is true; don't allow yourself to become eclipsed by the darkness.

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