

# In the Palace of the King

SEFER CHOFETZ CHAIM

Introduction: Positive Commandments 7-8

After the Destruction of the Beis Hamikdash (Temple), Hashem gave us a vital gift which would enable us to survive this long and bitter exile. He allowed the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) to manifest itself to some degree in the *beis haknesses* (*shul* or synagogue) and *beis hamidrash* (study hall). To this day, the *beis haknesses* and the *beis hamidrash* remain places where a Jew can connect with his Creator in a very profound way.

Against this backdrop, says the Chofetz Chaim, one can recognize the full gravity of speaking *loshon hora* in *shul*. From the words *ומקדשי תיראו* and *My Holy Place you should fear* (Vayikra 19:30) we learn that a Jew must treat his *shul* with dignity and only tread in it for holy pursuits. This commandment prohibits all forms of mundane conversation in *shul*. How much more so does this prohibition apply to *loshon hora* or *rechilus*, which indicate a complete lack of fear of Hashem, Whose presence is especially manifest in such holy places.

The Chofetz Chaim states that the hidden message which a person communicates when he speaks *loshon hora* in *shul*, G-d forbid, is that he does not really believe that Hashem resides there. Only with such an attitude could a person feel free to disobey Hashem's rules in His own house. The Zohar says

that the sin of ignoring Hashem in His house has grave spiritual repercussions in the upper worlds.

The Chofetz Chaim writes, "Since we are discussing the sin of speaking *loshon hora* in *shul*, I must tell you of the great misfortune that this causes."

A person wants to tell his neighbor in *shul* a story about something that happened to him, and he finds a most convenient time for this: immediately before the reading of the Torah. But when the congregation is ready to begin reading the Torah portion, the storyteller is still not finished. Now the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) whispers in this person's ear, "This is a great story. You've got to finish it." So the storyteller and his eager listener continue their conversation throughout the reading of the Torah. In doing so, they not only transgress a long list of prohibitions, but they also commit the overriding sin of creating a public *chilul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name) as they flagrantly ignore Hashem's Presence in His house and at the same time cause disgrace to the Torah.

The Chofetz Chaim tallies what this "important story" is going to bring these two people on the Heavenly scales of judgment.

They have spoken and listened to *loshon hora*, which almost always includes many prohibitions.

They have violated וְלֹא תַחֲלִילוּ אֶת שֵׁם קְדֹשִׁי And you shall not defame My Holy Name (Vayikra 22:32), a sin which is compounded by the fact that it was committed in the presence of ten or more Jews.



They have disregarded the Torah reading, and it is written, *וְעֲזָבֵי ה' יָבִיאוּ*, *And those who forsake Hashem will perish* (Yeshayah 1:28).

They have engaged in *devarim beteilim* (meaningless conversation) in *shul*.

"Woe to the speaker and the listener!" writes the Chofetz Chaim. He quotes the Vilna Gaon who states that it is impossible to comprehend the Heavenly punishment which such conversation can bring upon the participants.

The Chofetz Chaim adds another thought regarding those who speak during the reading of the Torah. The Torah reading concludes with *Kaddish* and it is highly unlikely that they will stop their conversation to answer to this all-important prayer. This is an incalculable loss. Our Sages, of blessed memory, have taught us the awesome power of answering *Amein Yehei Shemei Rabba* ("Amen, May His Great Name be blessed"). By answering with proper concentration and intent, one can cause severe Heavenly decrees to be broken. Several times each day, when *Kaddish* is recited, Hashem gives us the priceless opportunity to earn tremendous merit with just a few seconds of effort.

Imagine if someone offered you a check for one million dollars, with the only requirement being that you exert the miniscule effort of lifting the check off the table and putting it in your pocket. The reward for answering "*Amein, Yehei Shemei Rabba*" is much more than that, yet the storytellers are oblivious to this, essentially leaving millions of dollars sitting on the table, untouched.