



## **She Said What?**

**By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director**

We have all been there. We are scrolling through Facebook or Instagram and see a comment from an acquaintance. Probably not a friend beyond the Facebook realm. And she shared something so juicy, you can't wait to tell someone else. Ahhh, the start of a gossip train.

I've been there and that little spark of glee that comes from sharing is quickly replaced by, "Should I really have shared that?" I have worked to eliminate gossip; the sharing of info whether good or bad about someone else. I strive to just talk to the individual about what is happening in her life or his life. It doesn't matter that Shira wore the most beautiful dress when I am talking to Dahlia. It only matters about Dahlia.

### **Why Is It Wrong?**

Well, I want to share a story with you, a parable if you will. While the version I found was at Chabad.org, when I researched it, I found it on many websites - MyJewishLearning.org, Toughconversations.net and catholiceducation.org to name a few.

In a small town somewhere in Eastern Europe lived a nice man with a nasty problem: he talked too much about other people. He could not help himself. Whenever he heard a story about somebody he knew, and sometimes about somebody he did not know, he just had to tell it to his friends. Since he was in business, he heard quite a lot of rumors and stories. He loved the attention he got, and was delighted when they laughed because of the way he told his "anecdotes," which he sometimes embellished with little details he invented to make them funnier and juicier. Other than that, he was really a pleasant, goodhearted man.

He kind of knew it was wrong, but . . . it was too tempting, and in any case, most of what he told had really happened, didn't it? Many of his stories were just innocent and entertaining, weren't they?



One day he found out something really weird (but true) about another businessman in town. Of course he felt compelled to share what he knew with his colleagues, who told it to their friends, who told it to people they knew, who told it to their wives, who spoke with their friends and their neighbors. It went around town, till the unhappy businessman who was the main character in the story heard it. He ran to the rabbi of the town, and wailed and complained that he was ruined! Nobody would like to deal with him after this. His good name and his reputation were gone with the wind.

Now this rabbi knew his customers, so to speak, and he decided to summon the man who loved to tell stories. If he was not the one who started them, he might at least know who did.

When the nice man with the nasty problem heard from the rabbi how devastated his colleague was, he felt truly sorry. He honestly had not considered it such a big deal to tell this story, because it was true; the rabbi could check it out if he wanted. The rabbi sighed.

“True, not true, that really makes no difference! You just cannot tell stories about people. This is all *lashon hara*, slander, and it’s like murder—you kill a person’s reputation.” He said a lot more, and the man who started the rumor now felt really bad and sorry. “What can I do to make it undone?” he sobbed. “I will do anything you say!”

The rabbi looked at him. “Do you have any feather pillows in your house?” “Rabbi, I am not poor; I have a whole bunch of them. But what do you want me to do, sell them?”

“No, just bring me one.”

The man was mystified, but he returned a bit later to the rabbi’s study with a nice fluffy pillow under his arm. The rabbi opened the window and handed him a knife. “Cut it open!”

“But Rabbi, here in your study? It will make a mess!”



“Do as I say!”

And the man cut the pillow. A cloud of feathers came out. They landed on the chairs and on the bookcase, on the clock, on the cat which jumped after them. They floated over the table and into the teacups, on the rabbi and on the man with the knife, and a lot of them flew out of the window in a big swirling, whirling trail.

The rabbi waited 10 minutes. Then he ordered the man: “Now bring me back all the feathers, and stuff them back in your pillow. All of them, mind you. Not one may be missing!”

The man stared at the rabbi in disbelief. “That is impossible, Rabbi. The ones here in the room I might get, most of them, but the ones that flew out of the window are gone. Rabbi, I can’t do that, you know it!”

“Yes,” said the rabbi and nodded gravely, “that is how it is: once a rumor, a gossipy story, a ‘secret,’ leaves your mouth, you do not know where it ends up. It flies on the wings of the wind, and you can never get it back!”

### **Just Don’t Start**

I took this story to heart. I want to talk to Jason about Jason. I want to hear Jason’s opinions and learn more about Jason’s life. I want to know what Jason wants me to know about the accomplishments, the missteps, the joys that make up Jason. If I choose to tell you about me. About who I am; what I value; what I have done, good or bad, that is my choice. But I don’t believe I have the right to share this information about someone else.

### **It Isn’t Easy**

It sure isn’t. But I take it day by day so as to not fall into the gossip trap. I hope you join me. Facebook has enough business without us.

Shabbat Shalom!