

**Words  
matter**

# Learning Goals

Understand the creative and destructive nature of words

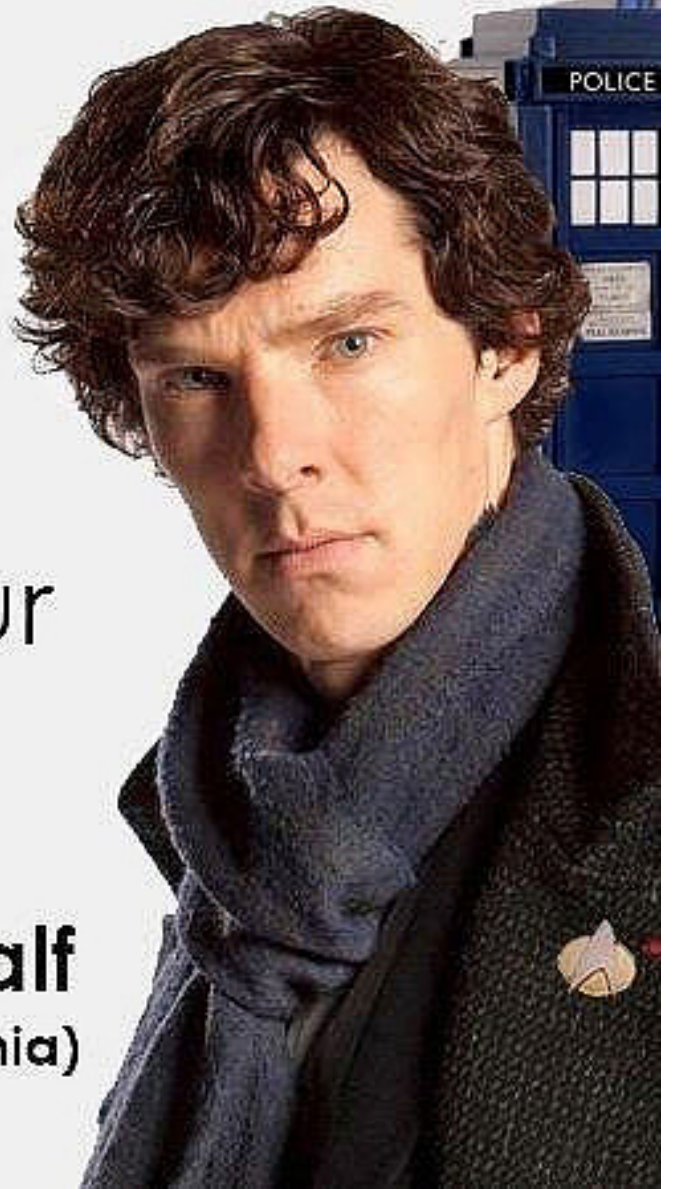
Learn about Lashon Hara & why it should be avoided

Create a way practically to mind our mouths!

# Share something!



“May the  
force be  
ever in your  
favor,  
Mr. Potter”  
-Gandalf  
(The Chronicles of Narnia)



## What is your FAVORITE QUOTE?

## WHY?

# Share something!

# Lashon Hara - Evil Speech

The gossip industry (TMZ, tabloids, etc) is worth about 3 BILLION dollars...

Judaism is pretty serious about guarding yourself from hearing or speaking **Lashon Hara** (gossip), literally, evil speech.

## Key Questions:

1. What gives our speech and our words power?
2. Why is Lashon Hara so bad?

## LET'S EXPLORE!

נצר לשונך מרע ושפתיך מדבר מרמה

Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully.

-Psalms, 34:14

מות וחיים ביד לשון ואהביה יאכל פריה

Death and life are in the hand of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its produce.

-Mishlei, 18:21



## Key Questions



# WORDS can CREATE

## PIRKEI AVOT CHAPTER 5

1. **בְּעֶשְׂרֵה מְאֹמְרוֹת נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם.** 1 With ten utterances the world was created.

2. Bereishit (Genesis) 1:1-29; Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Rosh HaShanah 32a – The ten statements through which the world was created.

1. In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth ... (Bereishit 1.1) ("In the beginning" is also a statement of God's as indicated by the verse, "By the word of God the heavens were made" – Rosh HaShanah 32a citing Tehilim/Psalms 33:6).	1. בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (בראשית א,א). (בראשית נמי מאמר הוא, דכתיב בְּדִבְרֵי ה' שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ - ראש השנה לב.)
2. God said, "Let there be light" (Bereishit 1:3).	2. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר (בראשית א,ג).
3. God said, "Let there be a firmament and let it divide the waters" (ibid. 1:6).	3. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מְבַדֵּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם (בראשית א,ו).
4. God said, "Let the waters be gathered, and let the dry land appear ..." (ibid. 1:9)	4. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אֶדְמָה... (בראשית א,ט).
5. God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation ..." (ibid. 1:11)	5. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ דְּשָׂא... (בראשית א,יא).
6. God said, "Let there be lights in the heavenly sky ..." (ibid. 1:14)	6. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם... (בראשית א,יד).
7. God said, "The water shall teem with swarms of living creatures ..." (ibid. 1:20)	7. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יִשְׂרָצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה... (בראשית א,כ).
8. God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures ..." (ibid. 1:24)	8. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה... (בראשית א,כד).
9. God said, "Let Us make man in Our image..." (ibid. 1:26)	9. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ... (בראשית א,כו).
10. God said, "Behold, I have given you every seed bearing plant on the face of the earth ... It shall be to you for food" (ibid. 1:29).	10. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כָּל עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע... לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָה... (בראשית א,כט).

# Pause and Reflect

**ASK:** Why do you think it is significant that G-d created the world through speech, using WORDS?



In Torah, words express essence because words are in fact the basis for the existence of those things which they describe: the world was created by God saying the words which themselves became the objects of Creation. In Hebrew, the word for a “**word**” and the word for a “**thing**” are the same – **davar**; all things in the world are in fact none other than Divine words crystallized into material existence. The words are the medium of Creation, and a correct grasp of the words is a correct grasp of the elements of Creation.



# WORDS can DESTROY

Sticks and Stones

by Mary Clark

It happened in the cereal aisle. I was so stunned that I stood there, frozen in place, shocked by the cruelty of a mother's words.

The store was crowded, and we were taking turns working our way down the aisle. A mother and a couple of children took their turn. The mom told a girl about 12 years old to reach an item on a lower shelf.

The girl reached down to get the item. As her hand touched the item that she thought her mother wanted, the mother screamed at her using a string of profanity and asked if she was stupid. She then proclaimed she had to do everything herself, pushed past the girl and got the item she wanted.

The girl did not react except to back out of the way. She wrapped her arms around her body and, with an emotionless mask on her face, walked down the aisle behind her grumbling mother. She was apparently used to the cruelty of the woman's words.

We're probably very familiar with the adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." In reality, words can hurt worse and leave more debilitating wounds than a stick or stone. Whether the words target a child or a spouse or a friend, the effects of cruel words can be devastating.

Words are an integral part of our lives. They connect humans in wonderful ways—it's with words that we share ideas, emotions, knowledge, humor and many other things. So many positive benefits come from using our words properly. But when we use them improperly, they tear down, damage and destroy.

I will forever have a picture in my mind of that young girl taking a step back and wrapping her arms around herself as her mother ranted on.

**Words can destroy**



# Pause and Reflect

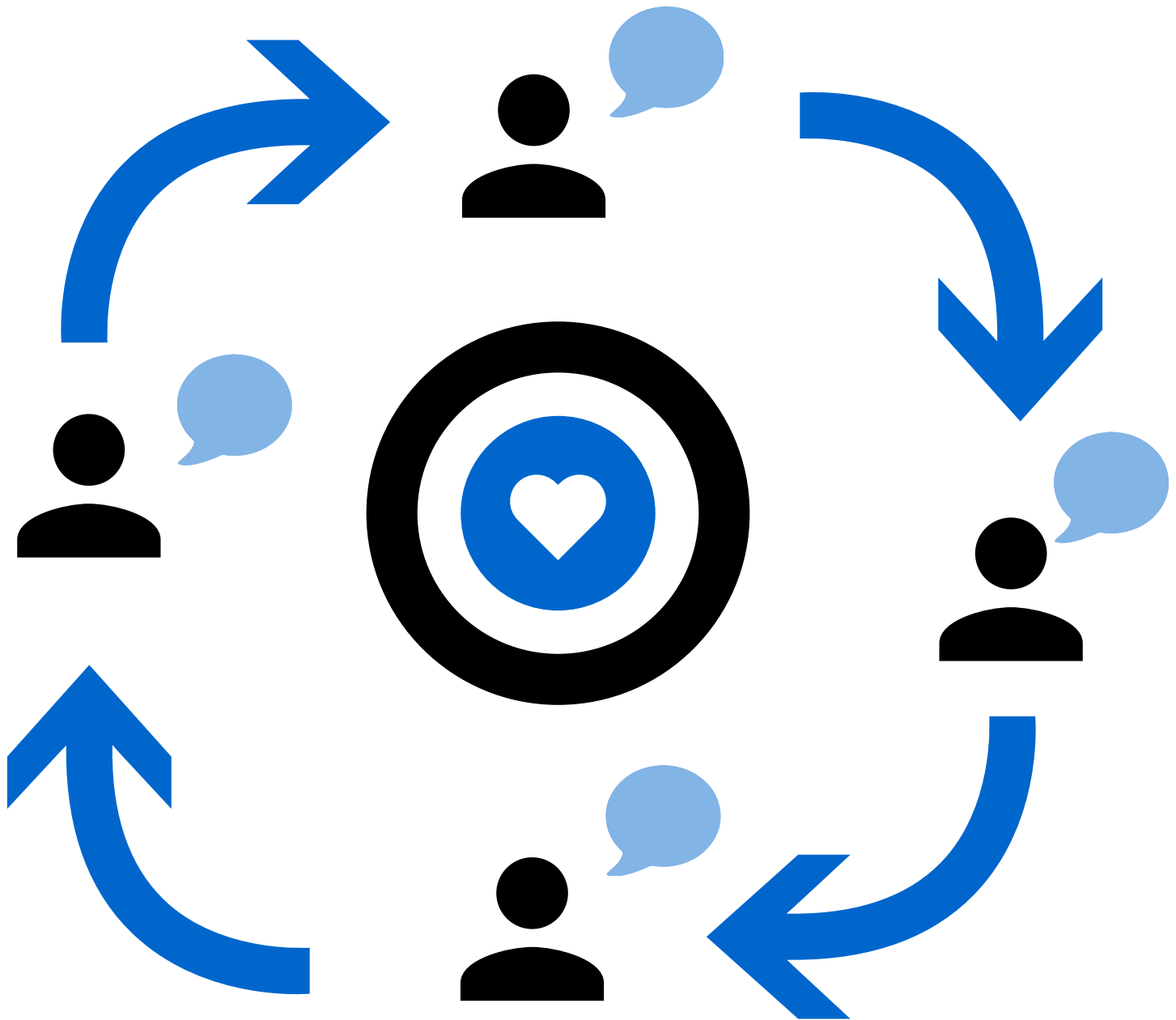
**ASK:** How many well known news stories can you recall that have to do with the destructive power of words?



words can destroy



# Let's try out the power of words for ourselves!



**1** One person starts - He or she should turn to the person to their left and say something nice to them, publicly!

**2** Repeat the nice thing that was said about you, then say something nice to the person to your left! Keep going until everyone in the circle has had a turn

**3** Discuss. Why did this exercise feel so nice? What did it **create**?

# Words are like seeds



One man spread a rumor about another. He later felt regret, and went to the rabbi to ask how to make amends. “Go to the store and buy a bag of seeds,” said the rabbi, “then go to a big open field and scatter the seeds into the wind. Do so and report back to me in a week.”

The man did as he was told, and came back the next week to find out what to do next.

“Now,” said the rabbi, “go back to the field and pick up all the seeds.”

“But,” the man protested, “those seeds have scattered far and wide! I’ll never find them all. Many have even already taken root!”

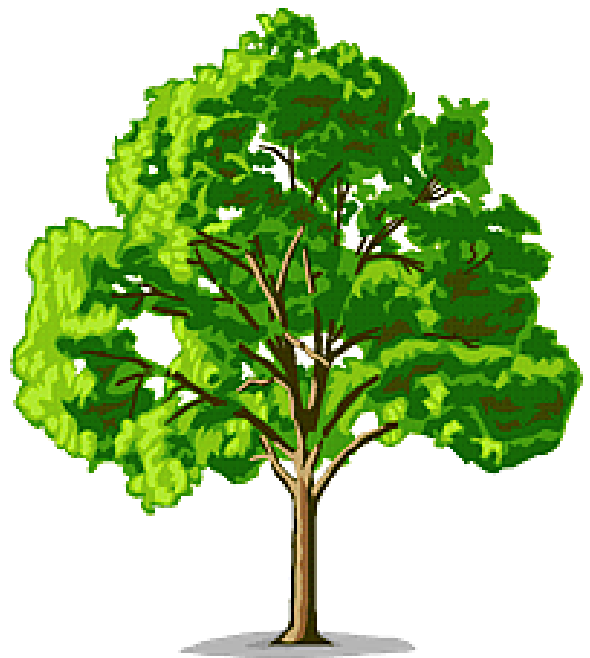
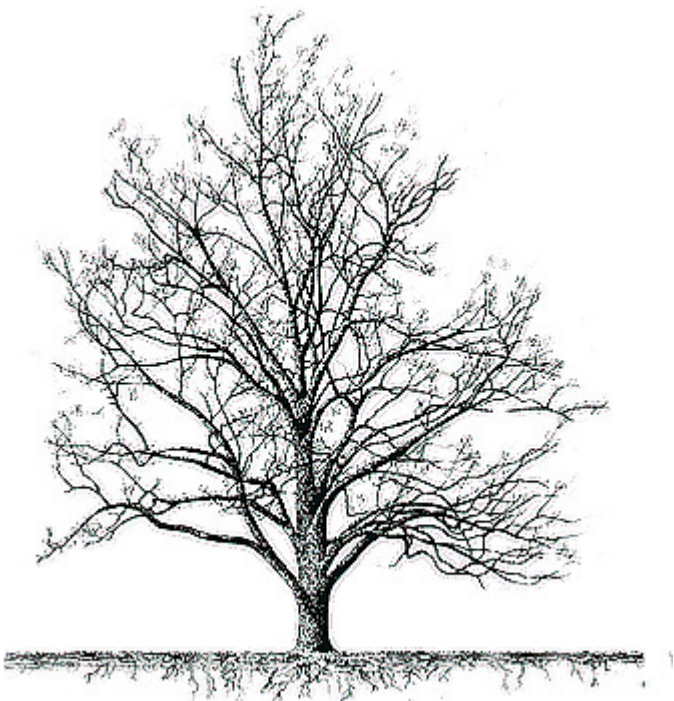
“Exactly,” explained the rabbi. “Now you understand. When we speak badly about another person, the effect is far and wide. And it is damage that can never be fully undone.”

-Rabbi Shraga Simmons

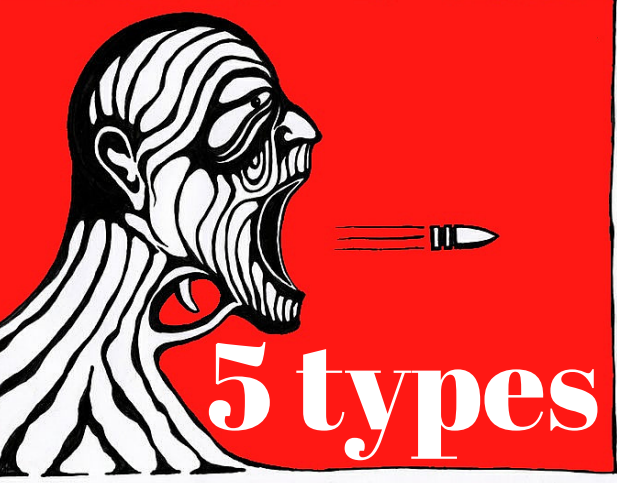
# Pause and **Reflect**

**ASK:** What type of seeds would you rather plant, positive or negative?

**How do you think it will in turn affect you?**







# 5 types of Lashon Hara

Create and discuss your own examples:

**1 Rechilut:** Speech that causes disputes

**2 Lashon Hara:** harmful or derogatory speech

**3 Motzi Shem Ra:** harmful or derogatory speech that is untrue

**4 Ona'at Devarim:** speech that causes emotional pain or embarrassment

**5 Avak Lashon Hara:** speech bordering on Lashon Hara

# Lashon Hara on Israel



A Land that consumes its inhabitants!

Bamidbar 13:32

אֶרֶץ אֹכֵלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הִוא

The Jewish people, while wandering the Desert, sent 12 spies to scout out the Land of Canaan (Israel). The spies spent 40 days scouting out the land and they came back with a huge cluster of grapes saying, “You all see the size of these grapes? You should see the size of some of the people who eat them. They are giants! No way can we beat them. This is "a land that consumes it's inhabitants!" We may as well go back to Egypt.”

**ASK:** What type of Lashon Hara did the spies speak about Israel?

There is a prohibition in Jewish codified law (Halacha) on speaking Lashon Hara against the Land of Israel. We learn this from the slander of the spies on Israel!

The Lashon Hara spoken by the spies about Israel was [so harmful that it] ultimately was the cause of the Jewish people wandering the desert for 40 years!  
Talmud Bavli, Arachin 15a

# What to do about Lashon Hara

Lashon Hara is so powerful in fact that it can erase the merits of a lifetime of Torah learning and Mitzvah observance. Just as the negative consequences of speech can be so vast, the positive consequences of proper speech are even greater. The Vilna Gaon says that proper speech is the single biggest factor in determining one's portion in the world to come. The Chofetz Chaim tells us that adherence to these laws empowers our prayers.



**Discuss:** What can we do to reduce our Lashon Hara and increase positive speech? **Come up with an idea as a group!**