

I know that most of you think I sit down in front of my computer and sermons flow forth from my fingers to the keyboard the way symphonies flowed from Mozart's pen to paper. If you do not think so, kindly allow me to keep believing that you do think so. But wait—that would not be entirely honest, would it? So I will be the one who comes clean. I work hard on my sermons. I think all week about what my topic should be. Once I pick the topic, there is usually research to be done, and I am talking about deep, scholarly research. Just today, when I finally settled on speaking about telling the truth, I had to sit and watch YouTube videos of the classic old game show from my youth, *To Tell The Truth*.

In one sense, it could not have been more hilarious. It did not begin very truthfully. The announcer began, "CBS presents this program in color!" What followed was in black and white. But the old, familiar panel was there: Tom Posten, Peggy Cass, Orsen Bean, and Kitty Carlisle, hosted by Bud Collyer. I thought I remembered one of my first crushes being on the show, Phyllis Newman, and I was right—she was on for ten episodes. But *To Tell the Truth* ran for ten full years, from 1957-1967. The game was to pick the real person out of a lineup of three, so by definition the two impostors were not telling the truth. So even on *To Tell the Truth*, it was sometimes important not to tell the truth.

Let me ask you a question. We all know how important it is not to spread false tales about another person. It is immoral, and also happens to be illegal. But what about true statements? Without a show of hands, how many of us can think of a true, embarrassing incident that would negatively impact our lives, at the very least embarrass us, were it to become public? If I were to call for a show of hands, most hands would go up, except for those who led very boring lives, or who were lying, or who correctly decided it was nobody's business. But human nature being human

nature, few of us want these types of things known about us, but we have an insatiable appetite to hear these types of things about others, even those we don't know, a quirk of human nature for which paparazzi and publishers of tabloids should thank God on a daily basis. The less it is our business, the more compelled we feel to learn all about it.

Isaac Bashevis Singer made an interesting observation about humanity when he said, "Even good people don't like to read novels about good people." That's why there are things that embarrass us that we want to keep private—again, human nature being what it is, that could easily become people's primary point of reference about us. And that is why in Judaism, the sin we call *lashon hara* is not spreading falsehoods about someone. It is telling the truth—but just because something is true, does not mean it is someone else's business and does not give you the right to spread it to others without a legitimate need for them to know.

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, who has written books on hurtful speech as well as many other topics, including two he co-authored with Dennis Prager, has the following suggestion for us: make an effort to go 24 hours without saying a single negative thing about anyone at all. As he points out, if someone was incapable of going 24 hours without alcohol, we would say that person is an alcoholic, someone whose drinking is out of control. Have we lost control of our speech? Let's try Rabbi Telushkin's experiment and find out.

This coming week is the observance of Tisha B'Av. *Lashon hara* is considered to be one of the sins for which we were punished by the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. This is no trifle. This is a big deal. Until we can control our tongues, we cannot control ourselves, even if what we are telling is the truth.