

ASK THE RABBI

Question: Rabbi, following up on last week's question of how do I fix a sin, is the same process true for loshon hara?

Answer: Last time we explained all sins can be broken down into two categories, between man and God and man to man. The second category, sins of man to man, also have components of man to God, for one has disobeyed God by offending his fellow man. In order to repent and gain atonement for sins between man and God, man must do three things, regret his past actions, confess aloud to God, and accept to never repeat that sin again. When it comes to sins between man and man, the preceding steps towards atonement must be followed, but one must also ask the person whom he offended for forgiveness as well. Only when he has appeased his friend will he be forgiven for his sin. Until that time his soul is stained with his sin, and he stands dirtied in front of Hashem.

It would seem that when it comes to loshon hara – saying bad things about someone - the normal path to repentance would apply, man must regret his past actions, confess aloud to God, accept to never repeat that sin again, and ask the person whom he offended for forgiveness as well. Rav Yisroel Salantar felt that loshon hara was the exception, for by asking forgiveness you are informing this person that people were saying negative things about him behind his back. This would hurt his feelings even more. Just because you want atonement, says Rav Salantar doesn't give you the right to hurt another person. Rav Salantar felt that there is no full repentance for loshon hara. The Chafetz Chaim disagrees and feels one must ask one you have spoken loshon hara about for forgiveness.