

# Afterthoughts

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## ELOKAI, N'TZOR L'SHONI MEI'RA

I was trying to figure out a way to undo some lashon hara that I had spoken one evening because I had "lost it". It seems like it's only after the fact that the guilt over speaking lashon hara is effective. Even those times when we realize, during the act itself that we are wrong, it doesn't necessarily stop us from continuing. And so, it was this time, as well, that I didn't stop myself.

Somehow, I had to convince my audience from the previous evening that what I had said couldn't be accepted at face value, that I had been wrong, that there could have been extenuating circumstances to explain the incident to which I had reacted so negatively. And I had to make it sound real, not like I was a "holier than thou" person showing how wonderful I was because I was publicly admitting my guilt.

As usual, Gd came through with the solution. He allowed me to have an insight into part of the davening that I had been saying for years but that had eluded me, even when I did have proper kavana.

Three times a day, we end the sh'moneh esrei with - ELOKAI, N'TZOR... My Gd, guard my tongue from evil... Let my soul be silent to those who curse me and let my soul be as the dust to all things. We request that we receive Divine help in avoiding lashon hara and misuse of speech, in general. But what is the connection between that request and the ones that follow, of 'let my soul be silent to those who curse me and let my soul be as the dust to all things'? I had learned, previously, that 'let my soul be as dust' was an emphasis on the need for us to be extremely humble and to react to insults and slights as if we were 'dust', almost worthless. But now it spoke to me differently and I realized an alternative meaning that might also be appropriate and still related.

When am I particularly vulnerable to speaking lashon hara? What triggers it more often than not? My anger. If I feel someone has been guilty of what I consider a wrongdoing or is espousing a doctrine with which I strongly disagree, then very often my anger takes over as expressed in the words: 'let my soul be silent to those who curse me.' How would one (certainly, I) react to an antagonist - even if it weren't to the extent of one who curses me? It's a reasonable conclusion that it would be with

anger. Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch addresses this clearly as not only referring to those who actually curse me, but to similar triggers: "He implores Gd to be at his side so that his lips and tongue may not become soiled with evil or enter the employ of falsehood and deceit. He needs the aid of Gd if he is to remain in control of himself, if he is to permit no insult to provoke his wrath if he is to be able to remain calm and silent even in the face of a curse" (Hirsch Siddur, p.158-159). And if my reaction is at all indicative of a common behavior, then this is the message here: Please, RIBONO SHEL OLAM let NAFSHI TIDOM, let me remain silent, help me control my words in all situations, even - maybe especially - in response to M'KAL'LAI to someone who has angered me. Because that is exactly when I am most likely to fall prey to the sin of lashon hara. If, however, I am able to respond as NAFSHI K'AFAR LAKOL TIHYEH, as Dovid HaMelech responded to Shim'i ben Gera, then I will be able to succeed in N'TZOR L'SHONI MEI'RA.