

## *Hasidic Tale: The Tale of The Feathers*



There was once a man named Yankel living in a small town in Eastern Europe who went about gossiping and telling stories about other townspeople without restraint. He would hear stories around town and - sometimes with little additions or changes to make them more entertaining - share the stories with everyone that he knew. He loved the attention that being the “storyteller” would bring him.

One time, he heard a strange - but true - fact about a well-known local businessman and started spreading the story around town. Soon, the businessman heard what was being said about him and he became distraught. He was sure that this story would destroy his reputation and ruin his business. So, he went to the town Rabbi.

“Rabbi, can you help me? This story that is being told about me...It will keep people from wanting to do business with me. What will I do? Can you help me?”

Knowing his townspeople well, the Rabbi was fairly certain that he knew who was spreading the story about the businessman around town. If it wasn't him, then he would certainly know who it was! The Rabbi summoned Yankel to the *shul* to come and see him. Yankel quickly fulfilled the Rabbi's request and appeared before him.

“Rabbi, what seems to be the matter?”

“Yankel, we all know how much you love to tell stories. At the moment, we have a problem...There is a story going around town about a certain local businessman. Do you know anything about it?”

As soon as the Rabbi completed his sentence, Yankel knew that there was problem. Of course he knew about the story about the businessman. And he was the one who was spreading it around. He didn't know what to say or how to answer the Rabbi. Yankel just stood and squirmed in place uncomfortably.

“The businessman came to see me recently and is very concerned that this story will ruin his reputation with the people of the town and destroy his business. You see Yankel, words may not be a weapon that you can hold in your hand, but *lashon hara* can cut as deeply as any sword...”

Yankel felt awful. He had never thought about the damage that telling stories to others could cause. He only thought about the joy and popularity that it brought to him. He wanted to do anything that he possibly could to repair the damage he had caused. “Rabbi, I am so terribly sorry. What can I do to make amends?”

The Rabbi thought for a moment and replied, “Do you have any feather pillows at home?”

“Yes, I have several.”

“Well, you will need only one,” the Rabbi replied. “Go home and come back to me tomorrow with a feather pillow.”

Yankel rushed home and set aside one feather pillow that he would take to the Rabbi the next day. All evening and night, he was troubled by the hurt that he had caused the businessman. After going to bed, he tossed and turned in his sleep until, finally, the sun rose and he could get up, go to the *shul* for minyan and then speak with the Rabbi.

Yankel quickly dressed, grabbed the feather pillow and made his way to the city square. Everyone in the streets looked at him strangely as he was carrying a feather pillow through town. He received the same looks when he arrived at the *shul*, but he joined in with the minyan and spent much time meditating on his wish to repair

the damage he had caused and his commitment to stop telling stories. When minyan ended, he joined the Rabbi in his study.

“Rabbi, this is the feather pillow you asked me to bring today. What would you like me to do with it?”

“Yankel, I would like you to cut the pillow open and go door to door around the town, laying one feather at the doorstep of every home. When you are done, come back and see me.”

Eager to fulfill the Rabbi’s - albeit bizarre - request, Yankel rushed outside, tore open the feather pillow and ran around town placing one feather at the doorstep of every home. When he was finished, the pillow almost entirely empty, he made his way back to see the Rabbi.

“Rabbi, I have done what you have asked of me.” Yankel exclaimed with a sense of both satisfaction and confusion, as he had no idea how this was going to help make up for what he had done.

“Now Yankel,” the Rabbi began “go back through the town and collect all of the feathers. Put them back into the pillow and bring the fully stuffed pillow back to me.”

“But Rabbi!!!” Yankel burst out. “That will be impossible. Even as I was walking away from the feathers, I saw that they were being blown from the doorsteps. How will I be able to find and gather up all of the feathers again?!?!?!?”

“Ah...” the Rabbi began his explanation. “And the same is true for *lashon hara*, for once you let it pass from your lips, you can never collect it back again. It floats and flutters away in whatever direction the wind carries it. That is why you must always watch your words carefully and avoid all talk of others. You will never be able to repair the damage you have caused, but I am hoping that you have learned a lesson...”

Yankel nodded with deep understanding. From that day forward, not only was he no longer the town storyteller, but he did everything he could to spread the word about the pitfalls of *lashon hara*.