

# Mean Girls Text Study

## Questions for Reading

1. **Narrative:** What are these texts talking about? Which resonates most with you and why?
2. **Allegory:** What are the deeper meanings of these texts?
3. **Today's World:** What are the lessons for today that these texts are trying to teach?
4. **Now Go and Do: If you took these texts seriously, what would you be inspired to do or consider?**
5. **Food for Thought:** Can you see using these texts with your teens? Why or why not? If so, How?

## Introduction to Text Study

Since time immemorial, people have known the power and pain of words. The Rabbis over 2,000 years ago created a hierarchy of effects words can have from slight embarrassment to humiliation to suicidal thoughts. In the 21st century, we have added another dimension of communication- through technology during which we cannot even see the other person's face or the effect our words make. Bullying has been around for centuries but social media makes it easier to instantaneously disperse in cyberspace. Anyone with a computer or smart phone on a social network can spread bullying at the click of a mouse. "Trolls" hide behind anonymity, sowing and inciting discord on the internet, by starting arguments or upsetting people by posting inflammatory comments or provoking an emotional response in a normal chat.

## Text Study

1. The person who listens to gossip is even worse than the person who tells it, because no harm could be done by gossip if no one listened to it. It has been said that **Lashon Hara** (disparaging speech) is deadly for just as the sword is used to kill, **Lashon Hara** kills three people: the person who speaks it, the person who hears it, and the person about whom it - **Babylonian Talmud**, tractate Arachin, page 15b (approx. 3rd century)

במערכא אמרי לשון תליתאי הקטיל תליתאי הורג טו. (א) למספרו ולמקבלו (ב) ולאומר

2. A Rabbi taught the following Baraita (teaching in the **Babylonian Talmud**) in the presence of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: if anyone makes his friend's face turn white from shame in public, it is as if he spilled blood i.e. Murdered his friend. He -Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak -said to the Rabbi- What you are saying is right- because I have seen how the red coloring leaves the face of an embarrassed person and his face turns white.

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: גדול אונאת דברים מאונאת ממון, שזה נאמר בו ויראת מאלהי  
ך וזה לא נאמר בו ויראת מאלהיך. ורבי אלעזר אומר: זה בגופו וזה בממונו. רבי שמואל בר נחמני אומר: זה  
- ניתן להישבון -

When one is embarrassed the features of a person's face lose their color and turn white; thus, the Talmudic term for humiliation, "*halbanat panim*," whitening of the face.

3. **Rabbi Yisroel Salanter** (20<sup>th</sup> century founder of Musar movement) "Not everything one thinks should be said. Not everything one says should be written. Not everything written down should be published."; Anonymity and instantaneousness of internet often allows things that would never be said or written go public so that there is a blurring of propriety and being a mensch.

4. **For the Chofetz Chaim** (19<sup>th</sup> century rabbi and scholar) "Even an innocent statement can become **Lashon Hara** depending on the context. A sarcastic tone or a wink may even be enough to convert an otherwise seemingly harmless statement into **Lashon Hara**. The rabbis understand that **Lashon Hara** is far from harmless. **Lashon Hara** causes divisiveness because evil speech can cause friends and family to become bitter enemies. Speaking **Lashon Hara** has a boomerang effect. According to the *Chovot HaLivavot* -Duties of the Heart...when a person speaks ill of others, he acquires their sins, while they acquire his merits."

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### Mean Girls' Quotes

- "Sometimes I feel like an iPhone without a case, I know I'm worth a lot and I have good functions, but I could almost shatter."
- "Being cruel is only a poison you are taking yourself"
- "Finding your voice in a way that doesn't compromise your dignity"
- "When you feel attacked- that's not a thing that's a feeling, don't react!!"

These quotes are taken directly from the Broadway musical- choose a Mean Girls quote to correspond and support one of the Jewish text?

### Question for Discussion

1. The quotes from Mean Girls teaches us that words can cause serious harm and we have to find strategies to rise above the meanness surrounding us. The Jewish sources teach us that for centuries the rabbis have warned against behavior that wounds or destroys lives through words.
  - How do you help teens recognize their potential to hurt others?
  - How do we help them see potential harm from another's view point?
  - How does this apply to me and my life?
  - As a result of this I will do.....
2. If your teen had written or said any of the above Mean Girl quotes, would you think this was part of typical adolescent behavior, a teen in crisis, or an opportunity to intervene and model?
3. How is *Lashon Hara* like a boomerang?