



A SACK FULL OF FEATHERS

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A Sack Full of Feathers is a legendary Jewish folktale that has been retold with variations many times. Debby Waldman's beautiful adaptation highlights the innocence of intention that is sometimes present in telling tales, as well as their destructive capacity

Folktales play a central role in Jewish literature. In many of these stories, as in this one, the rabbi is the central wise man of the shtetl (Yiddish for little Jewish town in Eastern Europe), though his counsel often seems silly or ill-advised at first. In this story, the rabbi teaches not by rebuking, but by allowing the child to see the hidden power of his actions.

LASHON HARA

Lashon Hara, translated literally as “bad tongue,” refers to Jewish teachings about gossip and speaking ill of another person. In the Bible we read, “Do not go up and down as a talebearer among your people” (Leviticus 19:16). Certainly one should not say callous untruths about another individual. The *Talmud* (book of rabbinic writings) goes further and instructs that we not speak negatively about another person even if the content of what is said is true. Judaism understands that this is a tall order: all of us are tempted by (and may even find pleasure in) lashon hara, which is why refraining from it truly elevates us to a higher standard of ethical living.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN READING

Ask your children the following questions:

- What were the three stories Yankel overheard and shared with his friends?
- How did the stories change from the truth?
- Even if the stories Yankel heard were true, why should he not have shared them with others?
- Why couldn't Yankel collect the feathers after he dispersed them?
- What was the lesson the rabbi taught Yankel?

Ask your children to describe some situations from school or play dates where lashon hara was taking place. Now that they know the lesson Yankel learned, how might your children have responded differently? Role-play some situations so that your children can begin to develop skills for changing the topic when someone is speaking unkindly about another.

A challenge may arise the next time your family sits down for a meal together and the interchange begins to slide in the direction of lashon hara. Try to direct the family conversation in a positive direction, remembering that the more you do so, the easier it will become. It is important to be open with your children about how difficult it is even for adults to say only kind things about others.