

**Practicing Loving and Respectful Kindness:
What do Jewish Moral Ethics have to offer us as Christians about gossip?**
(“Life and death are in the hands of the tongue.” (Proverbs 18:21))

This article continues our parishes’ series of catechetical instruction on the destructive and sinful consequences of gossip. Since the foundations of Christianity and Islam are well rooted in Judaism, this weekend let us take a brief reflection of the teachings of the past (e.g., Jesus’ time) and current Jewish faith practices regarding avoiding gossip—to examine and discover, just how closely we truly are in our respective faith’s teachings on this serious, problematic cultural issue.

As we recall, the Hebrew word translated “*gossip*” in the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament is defined as “*one who reveals secrets, one who goes about as a talebearer or scandal-monger.*” A gossip is a person, who has generally false information about another and proceeds to reveal it to those who have no business speaking or listening to it. It leads to a “character assassination”.

Some years ago, respected and renowned writer Rabbi Joseph Telushkin wrote two books, entitled: *A Code of Jewish Ethics: You Shall Be Holy* (Volume I) and *A Code of Jewish Ethics: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself* (Volume II). In them, he states (quote):

1. “Acts of kindness (the term is often translated as ‘*acts of loving-kindness*’) are regarded as something in which all people must engage, whether they feel motivated to do so or not. ... Charity is performed when an opportunity presents itself, while kindness can be done at any time. ... The Prophets understood kindness as being one of God’s central demands of human beings. ... In identifying God’s three most important demands of human beings, the prophet Micah speaks of doing justice, walking humbly with God, and ‘loving kindness’ (Micah 6:8).”

2. “The most [prevalent] reason we spread negative information and opinions about others is to diminish them and lower their [social or communal value and] status [and raise the gossipers’]. Gossip, therefore, enables us to [sinfully] feel superior to others. ... [T]he desire to gossip is sometimes fed not by hostility, but by [one’s] insecurity, and the craving to be regarded as an important person who knows [false] things that others do not. Though understandable [at times,] such behavior is still reprehensible, particularly when it causes us to betray a friend’s [trust] ... [G]ossiping about others ... reflects a poor character on the part of those who gossip.”

3. “The biblical law: ‘Do not stand idly by while your brother’s blood is shed’ (Leviticus 19:16), obliges us to intervene whenever someone’s life [including their character and reputation] is endangered. Based on the [biblical] law, we should inform a person if another is going about besmirching their reputation; [because] a person has a right [to know and defend themselves from such unjust and un-loving attacks].”

4. “Destroying [another’s character and] reputation is committing a kind of murder, an idea conveyed in English by the expression ‘*character assassination.*’ Damage done to a person’s good name and reputation often cannot [quickly, easily or EVER] be undone. ... [In following God’s Commandments, we are obliged to love God and our neighbor—including protecting our neighbor’s good name.]”

“Perverse speech sows discord, and talebearing [gossip] separates bosom friends.” (Proverbs 16:28)