

## Putting Others Down – *Onaat Devarim*

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There are two unethical ways people often make themselves feel superior to others. They get others to look up to them, even though they do not deserve the attention or praise. Or, these people say or do something to make others feel bad about themselves. Essentially these are two sides of the same coin. This chapter will investigate one of these Jewish concepts and sins, making a person feel pain by intentionally saying or doing something to that person.

This is the sin of *Onaat Devarim*, or “hurting another person through words.” What exactly is the sin of saying something that causes someone to feel bad? If the words are true, is it a sin at all? How can we specifically define this concept in Jewish law? What exactly is forbidden and permitted to do or say in this area? Finally, how severe is this sin on the scale of Jewish transgressions?

### **HURTING OTHERS WITH WORDS – IN THE TORAH AND THE DEFINITION**

While propping oneself under false pretenses is forbidden, as mentioned above, the other side of that same coin is the act of needlessly putting others down and causing them to feel anguish. Where does the Torah discuss this? What is the actual definition of the sin, and where and when is it permitted or prohibited?

Within three verses in the Torah, it twice says the words “*Lo Tonu*,” which can be translated as “You shall not defraud” or, more accurately, “You shall not cause distress” to your neighbor.<sup>1</sup> Why twice? What is the difference between the two verses? Rashi explains, based on the Talmud (and is clear from the context of the verse) that the first verse refers to defrauding or distressing a customer in a sale, since the verse refers to selling. This signifies that it is forbidden to overcharge a customer for an item, make the selling price significantly greater than the going rate (usually at least one sixth above market value). The second verse refers to causing distress to a person with words. When Rashi explains this verse,<sup>2</sup> he brings two different cases that cause distress to a person and represent the sin. First he says it is forbidden to “*Yaknit*” which is most accurately translated as teasing a person – i.e., making the person feel anguish by saying something that will distress him. The second example is asking the advice of a person in an area that he or she has absolutely no knowledge or expertise. Like the teasing, this will expose the person, make him or her feel embarrassed and cause psychological pain. Therefore, both types of “*Onaah*-grief” cause a person needless distress – one financial and the other psychological – are forbidden.

Some specific cases of verbal “*Onaah*-grief” are pointed out in the Mishna, while others are expanded upon in the Talmud. The Mishna states<sup>3</sup> that it is a sin of *Onaah* to enter a store and ask the salesman the price of an item if the customer has absolutely no intention at all to buy the merchandise. According to most opinions, this will unnecessarily cause distress to the salesman, who now expects to possibly make a sale but there is actually no chance of that happening. (This will be discussed in greater detail below.) The second example of the Mishna is more clear-cut: it is forbidden to tell a newly-religious person (*Baal Teshuva*) “I remember when you were a sinner,” as this will cause the person unnecessary distress and psychological pain. Similarly, concludes the Mishna, a person may not remind the son of converts that his parents were sinners before they converted.

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 25:14, 17

<sup>2</sup> Rashi commentary on Leviticus 25:17

<sup>3</sup> Mishna Baba Metzia 4:10

The Talmud repeats the examples of the Mishna and adds more cases explaining what is considered the sin of verbal *Onaah*.<sup>4</sup> If someone legitimately converts to Judaism (this would also apply to a newly religious person), it is forbidden to taunt this person and ask: “The same lips that ate non-Kosher food now wants to learn the holy Torah?” That Talmud continues and says that if someone is suffering terribly in life, either experiencing great and debilitating sickness or he has buried his children, for instance, it is forbidden to go over to this person (as did the friends of Job did) and say, “Do you know why you suffered? It was a punishment for your actions.” (It is important to note that just as the friends of Job were mistaken in explaining his suffering, so too, people who try to explain the reason for anyone else’s pain are usually wrong, and that is another reason why it is forbidden. See chapter about “How G-d Works in the World”.)

Another example cited by the Talmud is the situation where a person wants to buy wheat, and you send him (as a joke) to a person whom you know never sold wheat in his life. It causes distress to both the person desiring to purchase the wheat, wasting his time, as well as the person to whom he was referred. Rabbi Judah says that if a person has no money to buy an item, he may not go into a store and inquire about the details of the item as if he is trying to buy it (similar to the shopping case in the Mishna). Finally, the Talmud states that the verse prohibiting verbal distress intentionally concludes with the words, “You shall fear G-d, I am the L-rd.” Rashi, both on the verse and in the Talmud, explains this idea more deeply.<sup>5</sup> In many of the circumstances described above, it is impossible to detect the actual intention of the person causing the verbal distress. In the case of the wheat, for example, the person may later say, “I really thought he did sell wheat,” and no one can know for sure what was in that person’s heart. Therefore, in these cases (and in any other cases where an onlooker cannot detect the true intention of the perpetrator of the sin), the verse always says “You shall fear your G-d, I am the L-rd.” This indicates that there are only two who truly know the person’s intention – G-d and that person. G-d will indeed punish the person, even though no human court can ever punish that individual, as it cannot determine intention.

#### **DEFINING THE EXACT NATURE OF THE SIN OF ONAAH-CAUSING DISTRESS**

Although we now know the general prohibition of *Onaah* – i.e., causing anguish to another person by a verbal statement, the commentators tried to define precisely the nature of the sin, and the emotion behind the words that cause this sin. As we noted above, Rashi defined the act as one of teasing (*Lehaknit*).<sup>6</sup> But in the Talmud, Rashi defines this sin slightly differently. He says that these are words that cause pain to the heart of a person and almost bring a person to tears.<sup>7</sup> Rabbeinu Yonah disagrees and defines *Onaah* as words which cause the person (psychological) pain and inner stress.<sup>8</sup> Maimonides defines this sin as anything that hurts a person and makes him or her angry.<sup>9</sup> Shulchan Aruch differs radically in his definition of this sin. He says that *Onaah* are words that terrify a person and cause him or her to be frightened.<sup>10</sup> Although all of these emotions are somewhat related, each commentary sees the origin and basis of the sin in a slightly different manner.

Chinuch uses the words of Maimonides about not causing pain and anger, but then explains that the goal of this Mitzvah-commandment is to promote peace between people.<sup>11</sup> If individuals are careful not to cause any hurt to others, their sensitivity to all human beings will be heightened, and people would certainly live in more peace and harmony. He says that a Jew may not only not cause pain to others, but also may not embarrass them through his or her words. And even to hint to someone anything that might cause them distress is forbidden because the Torah was very careful about this particular commandment, since it affects people so harshly, much more than the loss of money. Then Chinuch speaks about how to react to someone who is causing pain with words. The recipient of *Onaah* is not expected to be like an inert rock and not react

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<sup>4</sup> Bava Metzia 58b

<sup>5</sup> Rash commentary on Leviticus 25:17 and on Bava Metzia 58b s.v. “*She-Harai*”

<sup>6</sup> Rashi commentary on Leviticus 25:17

<sup>7</sup> Rashi commentary on Bava Metzia 59b s.v. “*Chutz*”

<sup>8</sup> Shaarei Teshuva 3:25

<sup>9</sup> Maimonides, Sefer HaMitzvot, Negative Mitzvah 251

<sup>10</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 420:34

<sup>11</sup> Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 338

to the psychological pain that was caused, because that is not normal. While it is forbidden to initiate harsh words, if a fool does hurt a person with words, it is permitted to answer that person back in kind. Just as Judaism does not expect a person to remain still and not respond when physically attacked by another person, the Torah similarly does not expect a person to be quiet when verbally attacked either.

Rabbi Avraham Karelitz (1878-1953) follows the general path of Rashi and Rabbeinu Yonah in defining *Onaah* to signify words that cause psychological pain,<sup>12</sup> but then also says that he was very careful his entire life not to cause any discomfort to any person, even for one minute!<sup>13</sup>

When it comes to *Onaah* through words in the marketplace, the exact nature of the offense is a bit more difficult to define. Everyone agrees that one may not walk into a store and ask the price of an item without any intention to buy it and this, too, is verbal *Onaah*. The question is why. Sefer Chasidim seems to explain the reason as the inquiry about price raises the hopes of the merchant or salesperson to make a sale imminently (especially when a person is paid by commission, i.e., according to the number of sales).<sup>14</sup> When the sale is not then made, inevitably, the hopes of the seller are dashed and this causes him or her distress. This is not forbidden if there indeed was a possibility of a sale, since this is a normal aspect of any business. But to intentionally raise the hopes of the seller without any real prospect of a sale is the sin of causing unnecessary distress. Rashbam seems to say that while the shopper is wasting the time of the proprietor or salesperson since he or she no intention to buy, it takes their time away from someone else who could have actually bought the item.<sup>15</sup> This causes the business owner or salesperson unnecessary psychological pain.

Meiri gives a different reason for the sin.<sup>16</sup> He says that when a person rejects the item (that he or she never had any intention to buy), other customers in the store will see this and believe that the item is not worth the asking price, and that is why the person did not buy it. This may cause the merchant financial loss and certainly cause him or her distress. Shitta Mekubetzet quotes Raavad<sup>17</sup> and seems to agree with Sefer Chasidim, and says that a person's hopes are heightened any time someone takes an interest in a piece of merchandise for sale. By falsely raising the hopes of the salesperson, since the buyer has no intention to buy, he or she causes the seller distress.

### **THE IMPORTANCE AND SEVERITY OF THIS SIN**

There are numerous statements in the sources that show that causing distress to another human being is not just "another" sin, but indeed one of the most severe sins in the entire Torah. The Talmud states<sup>18</sup> that after the Temple was destroyed, the various "gates" by which a Jew can reach Heaven and G-d were closed – all except for one: the gate of *Onaah*-verbal distress. Rashi explains this signifies that if someone calls out to G-d about other sins and pain caused by other people, this person may or may not be answered. But he who cries out to G-d due to the pain from *Onaah*, he or she will certainly be answered by G-d. And Sefer Chasidim states that he who calls out to G-d in pain because of verbal wrongdoing perpetrated upon him or her, that person will be answered quickly, and the sinner will be hastily punished.<sup>19</sup>

The Talmud also states that the sin of hurting a person financially is not as severe as hurting a person verbally,<sup>20</sup> and it gives three reasons for this statement. In the verse describing the causing of financial pain, the phrase, "You shall fear G-d" does not appear, but it does appear at the end of the verse describing the sin of causing psychological pain. Second, a person can "undo" the sin of the causing financial loss by compensating the aggrieved individual later on with cash. But almost nothing can remove the pain suffered

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<sup>12</sup> Kovetz Igrot Chazon Ish, Section 1

<sup>13</sup> Chazon Ish, Kovetz Igrot 1:33

<sup>14</sup> Sefer Chasidim 311

<sup>15</sup> Rashbam commentary on Bava Metzia 58b

<sup>16</sup> Meiri commentary on Bava Metzia 58b

<sup>17</sup> Shitta Mekubetzet commentary on Bava Metzia 58b

<sup>18</sup> Bava Metzia 59a with Rashi commentary

<sup>19</sup> Sefer Chasidim 658

<sup>20</sup> Bava Metzia 58b

from words. Finally, the sin of causing financial loss only affects a person's possessions, while causing psychological pain affects the person's body. Maharal strengthens this idea by stating that causing pain to a person's soul is far worse than causing pain to an individual's money, since the soul belongs directly to G-d.<sup>21</sup> Another Talmudic passage says that the punishment for other sins is carried out by G-d's messengers, while the punishment for causing a person verbal pain is carried out by G-d Himself.<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Nachman in the Talmud taught that anyone who embarrasses another person publicly through words is tantamount to a murderer.<sup>23</sup> The Talmud then continues and explains that the phrase used here to embarrass signifies "whitening the face of the individual" because the embarrassment causes the blood of a person to actually leave one's face and make the person turn pale. This "loss of blood" is symbolically equivalent to actual loss of blood through murder.

Abaye says that every sinner goes down to *Gehinom*-a place of punishment, but only three types of sinners never rise from there. One of them is he who embarrasses someone else publicly.<sup>24</sup> Tosafot explains that normally a person is not left there eternally, but rises after twelve months. However, he who embarrasses another publicly completely loses his or her share in the World to Come.<sup>25</sup> Rabbi Abahu states that there are three sins that are so heinous that G-d's eyes never depart from them until the perpetrator is punished: idol worship, stealing and *Onaa* -verbal abuse.<sup>26</sup>

Pele Yoetz summarizes the entire scope of this sin when he defines this concept in a similar manner as the Rabbis defined the commandment to love your fellow neighbor: Do not cause any pain to someone else what you would not want to be caused to you.<sup>27</sup> Even small talk or a joke that hurts someone is included in this sin. The severity of this sin is codified in Jewish law and not left to mere philosophy: The Shulchan Aruch rules<sup>28</sup> that hurting someone verbally is far worse than hurting him or her financially, and that the victim of verbal abuse who calls out to G-d is immediately answered.

#### **HOW FAR DOES THIS SIN EXTEND?**

The sin of causing verbal pain to other people is so antithetical to Judaism that its prohibition extends far beyond the usual action of sins in other areas. Thus, the Talmud wisely stresses that, in particular, a man should be very careful with his wife in not heaping any verbal abuse upon her, and this is codified as part of normative Jewish law.<sup>29</sup> This concept is particularly poignant because many men have the ability to control themselves and act like a perfect gentleman with other people in the course of business or even with strangers, but always manage to say the wrong thing and cause hurt to their wives at home. And the sources allude to the fact that it is far easier to "fall into the trap" and cause pain to one's spouse than it is with other people.

This sin of causing pain to others is so severe that the Rabbis ascribed the prohibition of causing pain, even if no words were actually uttered by the sinner. Thus, Rabbi Judah HaChasid speaks about a person who intentionally lets mucus come out of his nose or does any other disgusting act with the intention of repulsing someone who sees this, or any other similar repulsive act.<sup>30</sup> This person has sinned as part of *Onaah*, since he or she has intentionally caused distress to another person. Even making a face that will repulse or distress another person, without saying anything, makes a person guilty of this sin according to another Rabbi of the Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup> These rulings may be based on the Talmudic passage which describes the story of Rabbi

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<sup>21</sup> Maharal, Netivot Olam 2, Ahavat Re-a 2

<sup>22</sup> Bava Metzia 59a with Rashi commentary

<sup>23</sup> Bava Metzia 58b with Rashi commentary

<sup>24</sup> Bava Metzia 58b

<sup>25</sup> Tosafot commentary on Bava Metzia 58b, s.v. "*Chutz*"

<sup>26</sup> Bava Metzia 59a with Rashi commentary

<sup>27</sup> Pele Yoetz, "*Onaah*"

<sup>28</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 228:1

<sup>29</sup> Bava Metzia 59a, Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 228:3

<sup>30</sup> Sefer Chasidim 641

<sup>31</sup> Sefer Yeraim 180

Rachumi who used to study out of his home city and would only return to his wife each year on the day before Yom Kippur.<sup>32</sup> One year he was so engrossed in his study that he simply forgot to return to his wife, who was anxiously anticipating his arrival, and he thereby caused her great distress. She became so depressed that she began to cry. At that moment, Rabbi Rachumi was sitting on a roof which collapsed and he died. Thus, we see that this Rabbi died because he inadvertently caused great distress to his wife, even though all he did was forget to return home. Therefore, even without words and even in a different city, this non-act is considered a commission of the sin of *Onaah*, since it caused such great psychological pain, and Rabbi Rachumi was punished with death by the Heavenly Court.

Sefer Chasidim describes another situation where doing nothing but merely sitting caused someone distress and was therefore a violation of the sin of *Onaah*.<sup>33</sup> If a person is a known genius in Talmud, and he sits in a class where the Talmud teacher is not as bright or as learned as he is, the teacher will feel threatened simply by having the genius sitting there and saying nothing. This is considered a violation of the sin of *Onaah* by the Talmud genius, as it causes distress to another Jew. Rabbeinu Yonah specifically states that to be guilty of this sin, it makes no difference if the psychological pain is caused through action or words<sup>34</sup> because we look at the result and not the specific cause. Rabbi Abraham Danzig, a 19<sup>th</sup> century decisor, agrees and rules as such in his book of Jewish law.<sup>35</sup>

There are two caveats to this sin, however. A person must actually intend to cause anguish to someone else in order to be guilty of this sin, and not merely do something unintentional that results in another person feeling distressed (unlike Rabbi Rachumi, who was judged more harshly because he was a great Rabbi). Thus, both Chinuch and Nachmanides stress the intentional aspect of the sin in order to be culpable.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, as pointed out above, it is often the case with this sin that the only person who knows whether the pain caused was indeed intentional is the perpetrator (and, of course, G-d.) According to two opinions, in order to be guilty of this sin in certain circumstances, the pain caused must be so great as to actually cause fear in the victim. Thus, Rabbeinu Yonah writes that if a person causes pain to the community where the people are actually afraid of this person, only then is he or she guilty of the sin of *Onaah*.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Shulchan Aruch says that if a person intentionally causes someone to be afraid, like sneaking up from behind and scaring him or her, the man or woman doing so is guilty of the sin of *Onaah*, but it is punished by the Heavenly Court and not by man.<sup>38</sup>

### **PRACTICAL AND UNUSUAL APPLICATIONS OF THIS SIN TODAY**

There is no shortage of practical cases that demonstrate this sin, neither in ancient times nor today, as we have demonstrated through the sources. However, the Rabbis in more modern times have faced Jewish legal questions based on cases brought before them that show us unusual applications of this sin. For example, Rabbi Moses Sofer was asked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century about the town's *shochet*-ritual slaughterer, whose wife gave birth to a girl. Then, this new father contacted the *mohel*, who performs Brit Milah-circumcision on boys, to circumcise his newborn, either as a joke or only to cause him distress. When the *Mohel* travelled quite a distance and discovered that the newborn was a girl and not a boy (and that he would not be compensated for his time), Rabbi Sofer was asked about this situation.<sup>39</sup> Rabbi Sofer castigates the *shochet*, says he is guilty of *Onaah*, and advises the community to remove this new father from his community position as *shochet*-slaughterer of Kosher meat.

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<sup>32</sup> Ketuvot 62b

<sup>33</sup> Sefer Chasidim 972

<sup>34</sup> Igeret HaTeshuva, 3

<sup>35</sup> Chayei Adam 2:143

<sup>36</sup> Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 243, Nachmanides commentary to Leviticus 25:14-15

<sup>37</sup> Shaarei Teshuva 3:165

<sup>38</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 420:32

<sup>39</sup> Responsa Chatam Sofer, Choshen Mishpat 176

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was asked about a situation where, in a family with two brothers, the younger brother found a prospective wife before the older brother.<sup>40</sup> Since this situation caused psychological pain and embarrassment to the older brother and to the parents (*Onaah*, even though this was not intentional), Rabbi Feinstein was asked whether they can and should delay the marriage of the younger brother until the older brother is married. In addition, in this case, the father of the bride was adamant not to delay the marriage. Rabbi Feinstein rules that since many grooms get married later due to many reasons, including learning Torah, any embarrassment that was felt was misplaced. Therefore, he not only allows the marriage to take place now, but suggests not delaying at all since it is a mitzvah to get married and no one should postpone performing a mitzvah.

Another area in which many recent Rabbis have written about is the sin of *Onaah* by depriving someone of his or her sleep, causing them distress. Although not mentioned in the Talmud or later commentaries, already in the 1800's this question was discussed. Rabbi Eliezer Greenwald (1867-1928) was asked about a situation where an observant Jew overslept one morning. The question was if this person should be woken up in order to recite the prayers in their proper time (within the first third of the daylight hours).<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, it is known that this person is very careful about praying in the proper time and waking him up will help him. On the other hand, a person who is sleeping is not culpable and considered *onus*-not his fault due to his sleeping, and not a sin. If it is known that the person would certainly want to be woken up, of course it is permitted to do so. And if the person goes to bed so late at night that there is little chance that he will wake up on time, then he is no longer considered *onus*-not his fault. But the larger question of intentionally depriving someone of sleep is an important one. One of the great Rabbis of the twentieth century, Rabbi Elchanan Wassermann (1874-1941) writes of an incident that took place when he visited the city of Radin and the Yeshiva of the Chafetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan).<sup>42</sup> One Rabbi had dozed off at the end of the Shabbat and asked Rabbi Wasserman to wake him for the monthly prayer recited for the moon (on Saturday night). When the Chafetz Chaim saw that he was about to wake up this Rabbi (who had asked him to do so), the Chafetz Chaim stopped him, turned pale, and asked him, "How can you wake him up? It is a clear violation of *Onaah*!"

A contemporary Rabbi, Yaakov Bloi, has written extensively about the sin of depriving someone of his or her sleep, and considers this act a clear violation of the sin of *Onaah*.<sup>43</sup> He discusses the sin of making noise in a neighborhood where it will disturb others who are sleeping. For example, someone in a top floor apartment will surely wake up sleeping people in an apartment below by making loud noise, and making noise during hours (late at night or even during the day) when an individual knows that certain people in the area are sleeping is forbidden. He cites the 11 PM hour as the time when in most societies it is prohibited for Jews to make any further noise, since most people go to sleep by that hour. But he does allow for an occasional simcha-joyous celebration past that hour, since most people understand this need and are willing to allow this noise on an occasional basis. However, if it is known that if someone is sick in one apartment, the Jewish law changes to require more sensitivity for this person regarding sleeping and reducing noise even during the day.

#### **WHEN ONAAH, CAUSING DISTRESS TO OTHERS, IS PERMITTED**

There are numerous circumstances in Judaism when what would normally be a sin is permitted. This is true with this sin as well, as severe as it is. One was briefly mentioned above. When an evil person makes another individual feel psychological pain, it is permitted to "give it back to him or her" and answer these hurtful words with words by the victim (just as in a physical attack you are not expected to remain a punching bag, but can and should return the punches to defend himself). This can be learned from a Talmudic passage<sup>44</sup> in which a eunuch berated Rabbi Yehoshua, who was bald. The eunuch asked him mockingly, "How far it is to Baldtown?" He responded, "It is as far as it is from here to Eunuchtown," thereby making fun of the man who

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<sup>40</sup> Responsa, Igrot Moshe, Even Ha-ezer 2:1

<sup>41</sup> Responsa Keren David, Orach Chaim 18

<sup>42</sup> Kovetz Maamarim Vigairut, Section 2, page 1

<sup>43</sup> Pitchei Choshen 15:3

<sup>44</sup> Shabbat 152a

insulted him. Thus, we see that Rabbi Judah answered back and legitimately caused distress to the man who had caused him distress. Similarly, the Talmud brings another story of the High Priest during the time that Shemaya and Avtalyon lived.<sup>45</sup> They were descended from converts, as everyone knew, and were the most popular scholars of their generation, who went out of their way to make peace between people. As the *Kohen Gadol*-High Priest left the Temple, an entourage of people followed him. But when they saw Shemaya and Avtalyon, they left the High Priest and naturally went to them. This angered the *Kohen Gadol*. When Shemaya and Avtalyon later visited the *Kohen Gadol*, he said to them (in anger), “May the descendants of non-Jews come in peace,” a slur and insult that is specifically forbidden (in the Talmud, as brought above). Rather than remain quiet after being verbally abused, they answered him and said, “May the descendants of non-Jews, who do the work of Aaron (speaking about themselves who worked towards peace) arrive in peace. But the descendant of Aaron (speaking about that High Priest) who does not do the work of Aaron, does not come in peace.” Thus, by answering this jealous High Priest with an insult of their own, they showed that this reaction is permitted in this circumstance.

An additional situation that permits speaking harshly to a Jew is when a person is a chronic sinner, and another person is convinced that through harsh words addressed to the sinning man, can bring this sinner to righteousness. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein rules this as permitted in Jewish law.<sup>46</sup> But Rabbi Epstein warns that this practice is only for select individuals, and the person’s intentions have to be pure. A Jew should not use this Jewish law as an excuse or rationalization to badmouth an evil person whom he detests.

There is another discussion in Judaism about whether it is permitted to lie, which is normally a sin, in order to avoid *Onaah*-causing a person psychological pain. This is the basis of an argument between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel.<sup>47</sup> At a wedding, is it permitted to say that the bride is beautiful, even if it is clear that she is physically ugly or deformed? The House of Shammai says no, and one must say “the bride as she is” for all brides. The House of Hillel says that a person should lie and say each bride is beautiful at her wedding in order to make her feel good and not feel pain (“the bride as she is”). It seems that the House of Hillel was able to convince the House of Shammai when the passage continues, and the House of Hillel asked them if a wife brings home a dress from the market (that cannot be returned) and she likes it very much, and then she asks her husband if she looks good in it. The dress is actually ugly but if the husband says so, it will cause distress (unnecessarily) to the wife. Thus, all parties seem to agree that it is preferable to lie (about the way the wife looks in the dress) rather than cause her psychological pain through harsh words. In addition, to that groom on that night, the bride is indeed beautiful, so it is not a total lie, just as to that wife, the dress is indeed beautiful. The importance of telling every bride that she is beautiful, no matter how she looks, is brought down in Jewish law by Shulchan Aruch.<sup>48</sup> Rabbi Judah Chasid writes that a person may lie in order to avoid words that would embarrass someone or make them feel pain.<sup>49</sup> But, like the Shulchan Aruch, the person should try to lie in a way that there is some truth in it, so that it is not an absolute, total lie.

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<sup>45</sup> Yoma 71b with Rashi commentary

<sup>46</sup> Aruch HaShulchan Choshen Mishpat 228:1

<sup>47</sup> Ketuvot 16b

<sup>48</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha-ezer 85:1

<sup>49</sup> Sefer Chasidim 642