

## New Jersey Jewish News Online Greater Middlesex County Feature

Rabbi urges community to avoid gossip, engage in 'kosher' talk



Rabbi Eliyahu Kaufman warned about the dangers of gossiping during a March 17 program at Congregation Etz Ahaim in Highland Park.

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A local rabbi warned against lashon hara, or hurtful speech, in the latest of a series of programs intended to foster ethical thought and deeds in the Middlesex County Orthodox community.

Rabbi Eliyahu Kaufman of [Congregation Ohav Emeth](#) in Highland Park spoke March 17 at [Congregation Etz Ahaim](#), also in Highland Park.

His talk kicked off the latest study module for the ACTT (Achieving Change Through Torah) program, an effort launched 10 months ago in response to a series of illnesses and other tragedies that proved draining to members of the area's Orthodox community.

The program offers lectures, classes, and other learning opportunities to "foster success for individuals who want to make meaningful and lasting changes in their lives," according to the ACTT brochure.

Among those changes, said Kaufman, is controlling the impulse to spread gossip or speak disparagingly of others.

"Our sages have told us the sin of *lashon hara*" slandering, denigrating someone, insulting someone, using profanity and inappropriate speech "is considered to be a terrible sin," he said.

In particular, Kaufman cited the teachings of the Polish sage Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen Kagan (1838-1933), also known as the Chofetz Chaim, whose works on guarding against *lashon hara* are considered definitive in the Orthodox community.

"He was a Torah giant who said that what comes out of our mouths should be as kosher as what we put into our mouths," said Kaufman.

Kaufman, who comes from several generations of rabbis, described a personal reason for revering

the works of the Chofetz Chaim.

He said that around 1930, when his mother was four years old, she became gravely ill and his grandparents were told by doctors she would not survive. His grandfather, a rabbi in Chicago, was a former student of the Chofetz Chaim and sent a telegram to the sage in Poland, asking him to pray for his daughter.

"Three days after the telegram was sent, my mother miraculously recovered," said Kaufman.

A friend later told his grandfather that the Chofetz Chaim had received the telegram in the middle of the night and had wakened all the students to recite psalms.

"It was determined that that was the exact moment my mother recovered," said Kaufman. "I would not be here if it were not for the Chofetz Chaim."

Kaufman said the prayers of the Chofetz Chaim were answered by God because, in a sense, his voice acted as that pure, finely tuned instrument.

"You've broken that instrument by engaging in lashon hara," said Kaufman. "But if you are careful of what you say, then when you pray, the mechanism is perfect and your prayers go directly to God."

Other synagogues involved in ACTT are Congregation Ahavas Achim in Highland Park, Congregation Ohr Torah in Edison, Congregation Poile Zedek in New Brunswick, and Young Israel of East Brunswick.

For more information on the [ACTT program](#), [email](#) or call 732-993-5376.