



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



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The second half of the Mishna instructing us not to speak excessively to one's wife is hard to understand on face value. It is important to appreciate that the Torah view is that women are powerful, unique and in many ways more naturally spiritual than men. The commentators are therefore all viewing the Mishna from this point of departure.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the Hebrew term used for "speak" in the Mishna is "sicha," which is usually understood as idle conversation. What the Mishna is getting at is that speaking excessively about mundane and less serious matters with one's wife, shortchanges her and may contribute to their not being able to achieve higher goals in life, like those spoken about in the first part of the Mishna. It may even eventually contribute to them falling down a slippery slope into negative behaviors.

If the way a person converses with his wife can cause him to veer from his goals and even to fall into the negative, how much more damage can come about with this type of interaction with other women?

Another idea that I heard to help understand this Mishna is that it is focused in part upon doing chessed and opening up one's home to others. Women may be more guarded when it comes to this type of kindness, because they are often the ones responsible for seeing to it that the needs of their family are met. Since they take this job very seriously, they may be more cautious when it comes to sharing with those outside their homes. In this instance, the Mishna is guiding the husband to inspire his wife with higher ideals (words) and not to overly indulge in mundane, materialistic conversation which may only strengthen this natural inclination.