

Parshat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

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A Lesson from Rabbi Yannai

In this week's Parsha, Parshat Kedoshim, the Torah commands us not to be gossiper. The term for a gossiper is a "rachil" which also connotes a peddler. Why does the Torah use the term "rachil?" The Medrash relates a story where Rabbi Yannai was sitting when a peddler came by and asked who would like a potion. The potion was someone who desires life is one who does not speak Loshon Hora. Rabbi Yannai said that he would like this potion. Rabbi Yannai declared that he never understood this message until this peddler came by. The question is: Rabbi Yannai was a big Torah scholar who obviously new about the great significance of not speaking Loshon Hora. Why did he all of a sudden understand this message only after this peddler came by? The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, brought to our attention the severity in speaking Loshon Hora and taught us how one is to keep the laws of not speaking Loshon Hora. The Chofetz Chaim spoke to people on a daily basis and still had the courage to abstain from speaking Loshon Hora. A peddler is someone who goes house to house to sell his wares. He speaks to people on a daily basis. Rabbi Yannai realized that one can be involved with people on a day-to-day basis and still refrain from speaking Loshon Hora by studying and applying its laws. During this period, we are mourning over the loss of the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva who passed away because even though they were the great Torah scholars of the generation, they did not respect one another. This period in the Jewish calendar is a good opportunity to study the laws of Loshon Hora and other areas of laws of interactions between man and friend.