

This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:1)

In the *Midrash*, *Chazal* recount the story of a *rochel*, peddler, who plied his wares in the villages surrounding Tzippori. He would proclaim, "Who wishes to buy an elixir of life?" Understandably, buyers from the entire area sought to purchase such a desirable commodity. Rabbi Yanai, who was studying *Torah* in the proximity of the peddler's announcement, called down to him, "Come up and let me purchase your wares". The peddler responded, "People of your caliber have no need for my wares." Refusing to be brushed aside, Rabbi Yanai was determined to see this elixir. Finally, the peddler deferred to Rabbi Yanai and came up to his study. He proceeded to take a bound copy of *Sefer Tehillim* out of his sack and pointed to the *pasuk*, "*Who is the man who wishes life, loves days to see good.*" *Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from evil.*"

Hearing this, Rabbi Yanai said, "All my life I have been reciting this *pasuk*, never realizing the simplicity of its message until this peddler came to enlighten me". The *Midrash* concludes that this is the reason that Moshe exhorted *Bnei Yisrael* with the words, "*This shall be the law of the metzora*". The word *metzora* is divisible into its component parts: *motzi, shem, ra*, "one who spreads rumors of a bad reputation." Moshe emphasized the law of the slanderer because *lashon hara* exacts a terrible toll on people.

This *Midrash* is often cited by the various commentators in order to elaborate upon the grave sin of *lashon hora*, suggesting the preventive measures one must take to refrain from slandering others. Probably the most significant lesson to be derived from here is that this elixir of life refers not only to one's spiritual life, but it applies equally to one's physical life. One who disparages, destroys others - and himself. This lesson seems simple enough. What was the content of the peddler's exposition of the *pasuk* that effected such a change in Rabbi Yanai? What knowledge did Rabbi Yanai now possess, which he did not have earlier?

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, addresses this question. He explains that although Rabbi Yanai understood the therapeutic powers of maintaining a clean mouth, he assumed that such a lesson/message could be learned only in the *Bais Hamedrash*. Such a healing elixir was not something one would typically find in a peddler's bag or in the streets of Tzippori. This was the powerful lesson Rabbi Yanai derived. David *Hamelech's* message was so simple it could have been learned anywhere. It was basic. If one wants to live, he must be careful about what he says. It is that simple!

Second, we see how *Chazal* assimilated any form of knowledge. Any truth that was clear to them became integrated into their lifestyle --- immediately. If it did not affect the way that they lived, the way they interacted with people, then it was not meaningful to them. Hence, as long as Rabbi Yanai did not perceive the profundity of this *pasuk's* message, it was not manifest in his lifestyle.