

IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Do not go around as a talebearer (Rakhil) among your people..." [19:16]

Rashi says that "those who engage in rumor-mongering and loshon hara go to friends' homes to spy out whatever negative things they might see or hear, in order that they might talk about them to others." So gossiping is connected with moving about -- and also with spying. We see the obvious connection between the Rakhil, the tale-bearer, and the Rokhel, the peddler -- Rashi also exchanges the letter khaf for a gimmel and refers to the Meragel, the spy.

Spying and Lashon Hara are deeply intertwined - a "snoop" is both a spy and a gossip. In both cases, the person is motivated to know and control information that isn't "his business." A gossip, like a spy, has no respect for boundaries.

In our parsha, we discuss many sorts of boundaries. One must respect his neighbor's property, avoiding thievery or stealing, and paying wages when due. In the beginning of our parsha, G-d says "You shall be Holy" [19:2], and Rashi comments "you shall withdraw from immoral sexual relationships -- for wherever you find sexual _boundaries_ [emphasis ours], you find Holiness, such as [in reference to the Kohanim, the priests] 'a prostitute or a defiled woman they will not take [as wives]... I am HaShem, Who Sanctifies you.'"

A person must recognize boundaries, and honor them. This is my business, this is my affair -- and this, on the other hand, is not. It isn't mine to take, to investigate, to talk about, to desire -- it is my neighbor's, may he be happy with it. This attitude must govern every element of our lives, from the way we talk, to the way we do business, to our personal relationships.

The Talmud says in Sotah [9b] that in the Garden of Eden, "The snake set his eyes on what was not meant to be his [Chava, Eve] -- the result was that what he wanted was not given to him, and what he already had [his feet] was taken away from him..."

The snake sinned through Lashon Hara, through evil speech (about G-d Himself, Medrash Rabba Breishis 20:1). Why? Because he desired what was not meant to be his. In both ways, the snake failed to respect the boundaries circumscribing what was or could be his -- and his punishment was that something which was indeed his own was taken away.

Let us learn from the mistakes of the snake!