

Sparks

by **Rabbi David Aaron**
Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta

Look Who's Talking: *The Truth About Gossip*

“For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?” ~~Jane Austen

“Gossip is a sort of smoke that comes from the dirty tobacco-pipes of those who diffuse it: it proves nothing but the bad taste of the smoker.” ~~George Elliot

Whoever speaks with an evil speech- **lashon hara** – is as if he denied G-d . . . Evil speech kills three people – the one who says it, the one who accepts it, and the one about whom it is said.
(**Maimonides** Hilkhos Deot 7:3)

A philosopher once said, “If a man finds himself, he has a mansion in which he can live for the rest of his life.” I would like to add: If a man does not find himself he can build mansion after mansion and try to compensate for the loss of self, but huge as his mansion may be, it won't do the trick.

The real you-the soul- is not at home in the ego. Unless you find your true home, no house — no matter how big – will be a home.

Where is the soul at home?

King David poetically put it in his Psalms: “Only one request I have of G-d, and this I will repeatedly ask: To sit in the House of G-d all the days of my life.”

The soul is at home only within the Soul of souls — G-d. And when we find our souls, ourselves, within G-d, we find G-d manifest within us.

The Torah recounts that G-d instructed the Israelites to build a sanctuary, telling Moses “Let them build a sanctuary and I will dwell in them.” Note that G-d did not say “I will dwell in the sanctuary.” G-d said “in them.”

When we are at home within G-d, G-d is at home within us.

The Kabbalah refers to the root of our existence as vessels. However, the original formation of the vessels were as individual points. Each vessel viewed itself as a self-defined point, separate of the others, and when they all wanted to receive God's light independently, they broke. Had they joined together they could have held the light, but acting independently they fell apart.

Clearly the Kabbalah is talking about an egotistical world where people believe that “each to his own.” It's a world where the ego is telling us that we are all separate, independent characters and have nothing

to do with each other. The ego says that putting another person down brings you higher up. The ego says there isn't enough for everybody so grab what you can. The ego says it's you against me. The ego's motto is: It is not whether you win or lose it's whether I win or lose.

It's the ego that wants to grab more territory, because it never feels secure, always wants more. It's the ego that goes to war. In such an egotistical world, there can be no peace — peace among us or peace within us.

Yet we yearn for peace – inner peace and peace in the world. And the latter cannot come without the former.

Peace

One night the telephone woke me from a sound sleep. It was my friend Jake. Ignoring my sleep slurry voice, he says anxiously, "I've got to come over."

"What? What's the matter?"

"I am by myself at home."

"Yeah?"

"You don't understand. I am by myself. I've got to come over."

"But I am sleeping."

"But I can't sleep."

"Why not?"

"I hate being alone."

I wanted to say, "Well, I love it — good night," but I didn't. I let Jake come over and keep me awake the rest of the night. Maybe it was worth it, because I did learn something from Jake. If you are not at peace with yourself, you are not going to like yourself for company. You can't sleep — you can have no rest.

Since then I have met hundreds of Jakes. People who are gregarious, very social, always laughing, joking and gossiping. People who are always busy, busy, busy, trying to fill every possible moment with work or activity or mind-numbing entertainment. Always talking-they have an opinion about everything and everyone. Anything to prevent that dreadful moment of silence when they can no longer drown out the cry of their soul craving genuine love and connection.

I remember when I was a teenager, there was rock and roll album that had this written on the bottom: "For best results, play at full blast." That was really what it was all about. Tune out your soul. Just blitz out. "Gimme the beat boys and free my soul, I want to get lost in your rock and roll and drift away."

You may succeed, but only for a little while. Because the soul is strong. It roars like a restless lion in its cage, rattling the bars of the cage the ego has built for it.

As long as the ego insists on breaking the world into separate pieces, setting one against the other, there can be no peace outside and therefore no peace inside. The soul knows its true identity is bound up with all other souls and G-d — the Soul of souls. But as long as it is imprisoned in the ego, the soul moans and cries and is in pain. You feel you are in a war zone.

The Hebrew word for peace is “shalom”, it is also the word for completeness. The soul is never complete or at peace in the ego. Although the ego thinks it is complete, self-defined and self-confined, that is an illusion.

Good illustrations of this are many of the ingenious works of Escher. Take for instance his 1938 work “Fish and Birds.” All the figures are painted so closely together that the back of a fish is the wing of the bird and so forth, and yet each seems complete unto itself as if it does not rely on those around it. But, if you were to remove a fish or a bird, they would all disappear.

The irony is that he who thinks he is complete, self-contained and can knock others down, lives an illusion. He is truly incomplete and is knocking himself down with those he gossips about and slanders. However, he who knows he is incomplete and always seeks to love and nurture others is upon the path towards true completeness.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, Love is My Religion and Tefilla Training