

# TOO MUCH FREEDOM THREATENS TRANQUILITY / GOSSIP DEFIES LOGIC

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #948 – The Ba'al Shacharis Who Forgot Maariv. Good Shabbos!

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## Shuva Hashem: A Prayer For Tranquility

There are a couple of *pesukim* in the *parsha* that are very well known to us: "When the Ark would journey, Moses said, 'Arise, Hashem, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You.' And when it rested, he would say 'Reside tranquilly, Hashem, among the myriads and thousands of Israel.'" [Bamidbar 10:35-36] When the Jewish people set out on their travels and the *Aron* – the centerpiece of the *Mishkan* – began to travel, the people would recite a prayer that G-d should protect them and scatter their enemies.

This is an extremely appropriate and logical thing to say at such a time. While *Klal Yisrael* were travelling in the desert, their enemies in fact sometimes attacked them. The first case, of course, was the attack of Amalek in Refidim [Shemos 17:8-13]. Many nations hated the Almighty and hated His people. Whenever they travelled it was a hostile environment and hence the prayer 'Arise Hashem and let Your enemies be scattered' was both a timely and appropriate prayer each time the camp of Israel set out on their journeys.

When *Klal Yisrael* arrived at their encampment and came to a place of rest, Moshe Rabbeinu said another prayer: *Shuva Hashem Rivevos Alfei Yisrael*. The simple way of translating this is "Return, Hashem, among the myriad and multitudes of *Klal Yisrael*". The first question we should ask is why was it even necessary to utter this prayer? They are camping. They have arrived at a secure place. What is the need for the prayer of *Shuva Hashem Rivevos Alfei Yisrael*? More to the point, Rashi [Bamidbar 10:36] writes the following on the words *Shuva Hashem*: Menachem (ben Saruk) [Spain, c 920-980] rendered the word *Shuva* as expressing tranquility, as in the *pasuk* "*b'shuva v'nachas teevashayun*" [In tranquility and calm you shall be saved] [Yeshaya 30:15].

Without this Rashi, if I would ask, "What does *Shuva Hashem* mean?" chances are most people would translate "Return Hashem". This means, we have been travelling, now Hashem return. This is

in fact how Targum Onkelos interprets it (*Tuv Hashem*) and this is in fact how the Targum Yonosan ben Uziel interprets it (*Tuv k'don meimre d'Hashem...*). The simple translation is that the word *Shuva* comes from the word *Shuv* meaning *return*. Rashi, however, interprets differently. Based on the tenth century Spanish grammarian who Rashi quotes several times in his commentary, Rashi translates *Shuva* as having the connotation *mirgo-ah*, meaning tranquility, peace and quiet, serenity. Rashi cites a *pasuk* in Yeshaya where the word *shuva* has that connotation.

I looked up two authentic English translations of Chumash and saw two different interpretations. The Samson Raphael Hirsch Chumash translates *Shuva* as "Come home, again Hashem". This is in line with the Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonasan, which is certainly the most common interpretation. However, the Art Scroll Chumash follows Rashi's translation, which is "Reside tranquilly, Hashem."

Why did Rashi take this approach to translating this expression and what is the real meaning of "with tranquility and calm"?

I saw an interesting observation in the *sefer Ikvei Erev*: When people are busy and occupied with important matters, most of the time they are too busy to get into arguments. People are too preoccupied with what they need to do so there is not much time for quibbling or argumentation. When the Jews were travelling, the only thing they had to worry about was an outside enemy. Therefore, the prayer "Your enemies, Hashem, should be scattered" is appropriate. However, when they camped, they had an idyllic situation, a situation the likes of which we have otherwise never seen: There was no need to make a living! What was there to do? Their clothes did not wear out; every morning they went outside and collected their daily provisions (the mann); everything was taken care of. There was nothing to do. It was a seemingly tranquil utopian situation. No taxes, no traffic, no hassle, no nothing! What could be better?

In such a scenario – when people have absolutely nothing to do – they start to get restless and start carping at one another. That is why, "And when it (the Aron) rested, (Moshe) would invoke the prayer of 'Shuva Hashem' – based on the connotation of *mirgo-ah*, tranquility.

I learned this truth several years ago and it took me a good part of my adult life to understand it: This idea is counter-intuitive and against the prevailing wind, but vacations are terrible. I do not know how many people notice this, but when a person has a schedule – he must get up at a certain time and needs to be somewhere at a certain time, when he is occupied with things that he needs to do most of the day so he has a schedule – everything is fine. However, when a person gets up in the morning and there is (seemingly) nothing to do, he becomes jumpy, uncomfortable, irritable, and argumentative. Why? It is precisely because he has nothing to do. It is not an idyllic situation when a person has too much free time on his hands.

This applies to vacations. *Kal V'Chomer ben bno shel kal v'chomer* (how much more so) this applies to retirement. Baruch Hashem, we are a community that after we all retire we will have what to do.

The time that we did not have when we were employed – to learn *daf yomi*, to learn *halacha* on a daily basis, to review the weekly *parsha* – there is plenty for us to do. However, the average Joe Blow working person did nothing but work for most of his life. When he retires, he drives his wife crazy. He has nothing to do. How many times can a person can read the newspaper? This is a common phenomenon. All sorts of periodicals write about it. Husbands who retire find themselves out of sorts, not knowing what to do, and they drive their wives crazy.

In fact, *Avos D'Rabbi Nassan* mentions this very concept: 'If a person has nothing to do and he sits around idly, he becomes depressed, his health deteriorates, and ultimately he in fact leaves this world.'

While they were in the Wilderness, they did not go to work. Of course, they had just received the Torah so they could spend their time learning, but I do not know if everybody could handle that full time. Therefore, they instituted a special prayer: When you come to your campsite, *Shuva Hashem, Rivevos Alfei Yisrael*: Grant tranquility, *Hashem*, to the myriads and thousands of Israel.

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## The Flippant Gossip Concludes: Heads You're Wicked; Tails You're Wicked

The end of the *parsha* contains the story of Miriam speaking *Lashon Harah* [gossip] about Moshe Rabbeinu. She complains that her brother was not treating his wife properly (he separated from her). Hashem explains to Miriam that Moshe Rabbeinu is not like every other prophet. As a punishment for speaking *Lashon Harah*, she was afflicted with *tzaraas*. Chazal say that this incident is one of the six things we need to remember every single day.

I would like to share a very interesting insight on the subject of *Lashon Harah*. The credit goes to a childhood friend, Mr. Eli Genauer from Seattle, Washington, who e-mailed this comment to me several weeks ago. Mr. Genauer found an insightful commentary on a *Mishna* in the third chapter of *Maseches Shekalim*. In the *Beis HaMikdash*, they kept all the coins (shekalim) for purchasing the sacrifices in a vault. The *halacha* is that people could not walk into this vault wearing a garment that had pockets or hems. People could not even walk in with shoes or while wearing *Tefillin*. It was essential for those who entered the vault to be above reproach and beyond suspicion that they might smuggle out some coins for personal use. The *halacha* even required them to speak the entire time so it would not be possible to hide coins in their mouths!

The concern was that if the people who managed the vault eventually became poor, people might attribute the change of fortune to Divine punishment for embezzling from the Temple treasury. Alternatively, the concern was that if the people would become wealthy and start to engage in conspicuous consumption, people might assume their wealth came from money stolen from the Temple treasury. The lesson is that a person needs to be concerned about what people will think or say just as he needs to be concerned about what the Almighty will think or say. We derive this teaching from Moshe's instruction to the Tribes of Gad and Reuven regarding fulfilling their

commitment to participate in the conquest of the Land of Canaan: "You shall be innocent from Hashem and from Israel." [Bamidbar 32:22] as well as the *pasuk* in Proverbs: "And you will find favor and goodly wisdom in the eyes of G-d and man" [Mishlei 3:4].

That is the lesson from the *Mishna* in *Shekalim*.

The *Perush HaKosev* in the *Ein Yakov* makes the following comment: The *Mishna* is concerned about an observer speaking out of both sides of his mouth! If, when the observer sees someone's fortunes change for the worse – the observer assumes the Almighty is punishing him for robbing the Temple, then the observer should assume that if the person's fortunes change for the better, the Almighty is rewarding him because he is a *Tzadik*!

On the other hand, if the observer assumes the observer became rich because he is wicked and stole his wealth from the Temple treasury, then if he became poor, he should recognize for sure that he resisted any temptation to pocket silver from the Temple even though he might have been able to get away with it!

This suspicious observer should not be able to have it both ways – explain the other person's poverty because he was wicked and G-d is angry with him and explain his wealth because he was wicked and G-d is angry with him! Let him make up his mind!

The answer is that the *Baal Lashon Harah* [serial gossiper] is so warped and perverted in his perception of things that he will express mutually exclusive and mutually contradictory theories just to speculate with malicious gossip. If the "*lomdus*" [logic] is "you are poor – therefore you must be wicked"; I will go that route; if the "*lomdus*" is "you are rich – therefore you must be wicked" – I will go that route. The *Baal Lashon Harah*'s mode of operation is "I will go any route that I can, just to demean you".

The nature of people who are perennial slanderers is to slander even based on logically mutually exclusive explanations. Such is the *Yetzer Harah* [evil inclination] of *Lashon Harah*. A person becomes so passionately invested in speaking slanderously that this passion drives him to speak in an illogical fashion.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Beha'aloscha is provided below:

- 015 Reconstituting the S'micha
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