

THE INNER LIFE OF A SECRET

by Nechama Stampler

The Inner Life of a Secret {1}

Moshe was frightened. He thought, "Indeed the matter is known!"

Rashi: His fright can be understood in its usual sense, as concern for his own safety. The word was out that he, Moshe, had killed the Egyptian, and he might suffer consequences. The Medrash, however, sees him frightened about the state of the Jewish people. Since the word had spread, there must be informers among the Jews. He reasoned that if this were the case, perhaps they would not be worthy of redemption.

Maharal: This Medrash conveys a deep and wondrous thought: anyone who possesses the characteristic of a loose tongue does not deserve redemption. Geulah comes from a lofty, inner, hidden quality, one that is not open and exposed. Someone who has no ability to keep hidden matters internalized shows that he does not possess any sterling value at his core. The value of that core is the key to redemption. Without it, redemption does not occur.

Let us enlarge this thought. If you had to distill the essence of a given people, you would look to well-known and apparent characteristics. The behavior and interests of that people would give you some understanding of how to define the core shared by that people.

If you try the same exercise in regard to Klal Yisrael, you come up with something very different. If you succeed at all in finding the kernel truth of Jewishness, it would have nothing to do with attributes or behavior that are externalized and therefore observable. That profound essence cannot easily be put into words, because it does not belong to the world of open and apparent phenomena. It comes from a level that is deep and profound, and not given to display. (It should be realized that this is a truism of life. Things that are deeper and more profound remain hidden; things that are placed in the public domain and well-trafficked are never very deep.) It is that deep level at which Klal Yisrael shows its affinity for HKBH. That affinity, that connection to Hashem is what makes it inappropriate for Klal Yisrael to remain subjugated to any temporal power. Klal Yisrael, through its attachment to Hashem, should be subservient to none but Him.

Moshe saw the incidence of informers among the people as evidence that Klal Yisrael had somehow compromised or suppressed this profound level. By expressing things openly that should by right have remained concealed, these informers demonstrated that they had no profound, inner place. Their madregah was an external one, like other nations.

Actually, their madregah was more debased than that of other people. Those nations are all governed by natural, physical laws. Their existence is based on the externalities of the physical world. There is nothing particularly inappropriate in their attempt to keep all things out in the open. For Klal Yisrael, however, such a tendency represents a dereliction of duty and abandonment of a lofty role. Therefore, it is out of the ordinary for any other nation to remain subjugated over an extended period of time. Each nation has its assigned place and purpose, and the laws of history sustain each people in its role. A nation may find itself under the thumb of a stronger one for a while, but it will not remain a distinct people and a long-term subject at the same time.

Klal Yisrael's position, on the other hand, is to be with Hashem. If it jettisons the madregah that enables the connection with Hashem, it has nothing more to sustain it, and finds itself under the extended thumb of oppressor after oppressor. Moshe, thinking that the behavior of the informers was more widespread than it was, feared that Klal Yisrael had lost its inner compass, and set itself up for prolonged shibud.

Sadly, Jews are more prone to this evil behavior than other people. Because Jews initially possess the madregah of sod, or preserving hiddenness, when they seek out more degraded ways to live they must turn their backs on their former defining characteristic. Opting out of kedushas Yisrael has to mean opting out of the preservation of sod. Exiting their assigned madregah means rejecting the entire principle of discretion and tzniyus. Other peoples never possessed this inner, profound state to begin with. When they attach themselves to degradation, it can take many forms - but it need not necessarily mean rejecting the values of privacy, secrecy and circumspection.

It turned out that the incidence of informers in the midst of the Bnei Yisrael was much less than Moshe had thought. Geulah did come - because Klal Yisrael preserved and protected that inner core, and with it attached themselves to HKBH.

1. Based on Gur Aryeh, Shemos 2:14; Nesiv ha-Shesika, chap.1; Gevuros Hashem, chap. 60,
