

# CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

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Midrash Rabbah teaches that one of the merits that enabled Bnei Yisrael to be redeemed from Egypt was that they did not reveal each other's secrets. How do we know that they did not? Because Moshe Rabbeinu told them (in our Parashah--3:22): "Each woman shall request from her neighbor and from the one who lives in her house silver vessels, golden vessels, and garments; and you shall put them on your sons and daughters, and you shall empty out Egypt." Although they were told this a full year before the actual Exodus, no one forewarned the Egyptians about it.

R' Chaim Zaichyk z"l (1906-1989; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet Yosef-Novardok in Buchach, Poland; later in Israel) asks: What's the big deal; is it so hard to keep a secret? And he answers: Yes, it is. Indeed, the only reason there are explorers and dare-devils in the world, R' Zaichyk writes, is because they want to have adventures that they can tell others about. As R' Yehuda Heller Kahana z"l (1743-1819; rabbi of Sighet, Hungary) writes: If a person were offered a chance to travel to outer space, he would have no pleasure from his journey until he could return and shared his experiences with someone else.

R' Zaichyk continues: The Sages during and after the Second Bet Hamikdash criticized the Avtinas family for not sharing the formula of the Ketoret / incense. One day, however, they gave the formula to the sage Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri. When he told Rabbi Akiva, the latter cried and declared, "Now we may no longer criticize them!" Why was Rabbi Akiva so moved, asks R' Zaichyk? He explains: At first the Sages thought that the Avtinas family was concealing the Ketoret recipe for its own glory. However, once they shared it with Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri, Rabbi Akiva realized that they wanted to share the recipe and were just waiting for the right person and the right time and place. To keep a secret that you want to share until the time is ripe is an act of extreme self control, and is praiseworthy. (Haggadah Shel Pesach R' Chaim Zaichyk zt"l p.120)

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***"They embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks, and with every labor of the field." (1:14)***

R' Shlomo Zarka z"l (Algeria; died 1876) and R' Yehuda Chermon z"l (Algeria; 1812-1911) ask: Why does the verse begin with construction work ("with mortar and with bricks") and then switch to farm work ("every labor of the field")?

They explain: As we read later in the Parashah, Bnei Yisrael had a quota of bricks they had to produce each day. If they finished early, they could go home for the day. However, on their way home, Egyptians would grab them and force them to do farm work and perform other tasks, i.e., "every labor of the field." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Rinah V'yeshuah p.102)

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***"It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens." (2:11)***

Midrash Rabbah teaches: Moshe saw that weak people were forced to carry large burdens, and strong people were required to carry small burdens; women were forced to carry burdens appropriate for men, and men were forced to carry burdens appropriate for women. [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Klonimus Kalmish Shapira z"l Hy"d (Chassidic Rebbe of Piasetzno, Poland; killed in the Holocaust in 1943) asks: It is understandable that the Midrash relates that weak people were forced to carry large burdens. But, why would the Midrash view it as oppression that strong people were required to carry small burdens?

He explains: The difficulty of any task depends on the nature of the one doing it. A burly construction worker can carry heavy cinder blocks all day long, but force him to perform a more delicate task and it will pain him. Force a scholar to carry even a light burden, and he will suffer; likewise, if a farm worker were impressed into kitchen duty, it would be an unbearable chore. This was the Egyptians' plan: to oppress Bnei Yisrael by forcing every man and woman to do work that was not suitable for his or her nature.

R' Shapira adds: The same thing is true in the spiritual realm--ask someone to do something that it is not in his nature, and it will be unpleasant. Thus, a person who is focused on Olam Ha'zeh / the material world will not object to performing the most difficult work or studying the most complex science, but he will assert that Torah study is too difficult or boring. On the other hand, a Ben Olam Ha'ba / a person whose life is focused on spiritual growth will have exactly the opposite reaction. Indeed, a person can use this as a litmus test to determine which world--Olam Ha'zeh or Olam Ha'ba--he belongs to. (Chovat Ha'talmidim ch.12)

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***"Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yitro, his father-in-law . . ." (3:1)***

A Midrash comments on the verse (Tehilim 11:5), "Hashem will test a Tzaddik"– Hashem tested Moshe and David as shepherds. [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Aharon Kotler z"l (1891–1962; Rosh Yeshiva in Kletsk, Poland, and Lakewood, N.J.) asks: What does being a shepherd have to do with leading the Jewish People? He answers: A person who is organized, diligent, and caring about small things--for example, sheep--will be organized, diligent, and caring about big things too--i.e., the whole nation. One who is callous or lax about small things will behave so about big things also. (Mishnat Rabbi Aharon Vol. I, p.116)

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***"An angel of Elokim appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush. He saw, and behold! The bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed." (3:2)***

R' Yaakov bar Abba Mari Antoli z"l (France and Italy; died 1256) writes: Among other lessons, this vision was meant to teach Moshe at the outset of his career that Hashem, Who is very lofty, rests His Shechinah even on a nation that is at its lowest point, just as He appeared from within a lowly shrub. And, Hashem appeared from inside a bush that was burning but was not consumed to teach that such is the destiny of the Jewish People in exile: to be oppressed, but never to be destroyed. (Malmad Ha'Talmidim: Parashat Tzav p.95a)

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***"Moshe said to the Elokim, 'Behold, when I come to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, "The Elokim of your forefathers has sent me to you," and they say to me, "What is His Name?" -- what shall I say to them?' Elokim answered Moshe, 'I Shall Be As I Shall Be'." (3:13)***

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) asks: Why did Moshe expect Bnei Yisrael to ask him at this stage what G-d's Name is? Moreover, what good was the answer Moshe was given? If Bnei Yisrael already knew the Divine Name "I Shall Be As I Shall Be," they would assume Moshe learned it the same way they had learned it; thus, his mentioning it now would not prove that Hashem had spoken to him! On the other hand, if Bnei Yisrael did not know this Divine Name, then what value was there in citing it?

Rambam explains: In Moshe's time, nearly all people attributed Divine power to heavenly bodies, spirits, and angels. And, while there were people who claimed that those entities had spoken to them, no one before Moshe Rabbeinu's time had claimed that G-d Himself appeared to him with a message for mankind. Even Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov never claimed that Hashem had told them, "Tell mankind, 'Do this!' or 'Don't do that!'" The Patriarchs' prophecies were for their private use, and Moshe was the first to claim he was a messenger from G-d to other people.

Given this environment in which Bnei Yisrael had been raised, continues Rambam, Moshe expected that Bnei Yisrael would respond to his message, "How can we be sure that the G-d for Whom you are speaking even exists?" Moshe also expected that they would say, "Prove that, if He exists, G-d gives prophets messages, as you are claiming He gave you."

In response to Moshe's first concern, Hashem told him to say, "I Shall Be As I Shall Be." This Divine Name indicates that there is no way to describe Hashem other than to say, "He is what He is." He cannot be defined because He is not of this world, in contrast to the heavenly bodies, spirits, and angels that were worshiped in those days, all of which are part of this world. Also, He is eternal, unlike those other entities which are not eternal. Hashem added (verses 16, 18), "Go and gather the elders of Yisrael . . . They will heed your voice."

As for Moshe's second concern, convincing the masses of Bnei Yisrael that Hashem had sent him--for that Hashem gave Moshe the various signs (such as turning the staff into a serpent). (Moreh Nevochim, Part I ch.63)

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## Tehilim

*Siddur Avodat Yisrael cites a custom to recite Psalm 99 on the Shabbat on which Parashat Shmot is read. Accordingly, we present here verses from, and commentaries on, that Psalm.*

R' Moshe Alsheich z"l (1508–1593; Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael) notes that tradition ascribes the authorship of this Psalm to Moshe Rabbeinu. (Romemot Kel)

***"Hashem has reigned, peoples will tremble; before Him Who is enthroned on Keruvim, the earth will quake." (99:1)***

Midrash Shocheh Tov explains: "As long as the Jewish People are in exile, the Heavenly Kingdom is incomplete and the nations of the world live in tranquility. However, when the Jewish People are redeemed, the Heavenly Kingdom will be complete and the nations of the world will tremble."

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (Italy; 1697-1777) elaborates: At the time of the Redemption, the good people among the nations will continue to exist; only the wicked ones among them will be destroyed. There is no doubt that those who are destined for destruction will tremble when they see their impending downfall.

The Psalm continues (verse 2): "Before Hashem Who is great in Tziyon and Who is exalted above all peoples." R' Valle explains: At the time of the Redemption, Hashem will want to demonstrate His greatness and loftiness over all the nations so as to force them to accept His Torah and subjugate themselves to Him. If they do not respond, He will destroy them.

In the end, R' Valle continues, the good people among the nations will recognize and know, through the kindness and compassion that Hashem will demonstrate, that His Name alone is elevated. This is

the meaning of the next verse (verse 3): "They will gratefully praise Your great and awesome Name."  
(Be'ur Sefer Tehilim)