

IN ORDER TO BE A BELIEVER, ONE MUST FIRST BE TRUSTWORTHY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayikra

In Order To A Believer, One Must First Be Trustworthy

The following is based on idea I heard from Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon. It was primarily a talk about Pesach, but it also has a tie-in to this week's parsha.

The first pasuk [verse] of Parshas Vayikra reads: "He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying (leimor)" [Vayikra 1:1] The Gemara teaches that the word leimor means to say over to others. The Talmud derives from this wording construction that one is not allowed to share information he is told in private unless the party who related the information specifically authorizes its further transmission. [Yoma 4b] This is known as the prohibition of Gilui Sod - revealing a secret.

In the secular world, there is a concept of lawyer-client privilege and doctor-patient confidentiality, where a lawyer or doctor is not permitted to reveal information provided to him in confidence. In halacha, this requirement has a much broader scope and basically applies to every Jew.

The Yalkut in Parshas Emor states that in the merit of 4 things, the Jews merited to be redeemed from Egypt. The first 3 are well known: They did not change their names, their language, or their mode of dress. The fourth source of merit enumerated by the Medrash is that they did not speak lashon hara [gossip; slander]. As proof that they did not speak lashon hara in Egypt, the Medrash cites the fact that they were able to keep a secret. The secret that they kept refers to G-d's original message to Moshe in Parshas Shmos: "I am going to take the Jews out of Egypt and before I take them out of Egypt they are going to go to their neighbors and ask for their gold and silver vessels." The Jews heard this prophecy before any of the plagues began and no one let it get out to the Egyptians that before the Jews left they would strip the Egypt of all gold and silver! The Egyptians were unsuspecting because no Jew revealed this secret.

The question that must be asked regarding this Medrash is - what is the connection between keeping a secret and not speaking lashon hara? The answer to this question is actually an explicit

pasuk in Proverbs: "One who goes along slandering reveals secrets" [Mishlei 11:13]. The root problem of one who slanders is that he cannot be trusted. If a person shares it with others that which he is told in confidence, there is a fundamental problem, besides the aspect of slander (rechilus). The person's word is not a word. He cannot be trusted.

The Medrash is teaching that the reason why they were redeemed from Egypt was, among other reasons, because they were able to keep secrets. What is so great about being able to keep secrets?

Prior to answering this question, consider another incident at the beginning of Sefer Shmos. When Moshe Rabbeinu was still in Egypt, he saw an Egyptian beating up a Jew. He killed the Egyptian. The next day, he saw two Jews fighting. He said to the bully, "Wicked one, why are you hitting your fellow man?" The bully turned on Moshe and said "Aha, do you plan to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?" Moshe's reaction was "Behold, the matter is known" (achen nodah ha'davar) [Shmos 2:11-14].

Rashi explains that the words achen nodah ha'davar do not merely mean "behold the secret is out". Rather, the words mean: "behold, now I understand (i.e. - the matter is known to ME) what Israel's sin was that caused them to suffer as slaves. In other words, Moshe now understood why the redemption has not yet arrived. It was because they couldn't keep a secret.

So we see from the very beginning of the story in Shmos that getting out of Egypt was somehow dependant on the ability of Israel to keep secrets. So again we must ask, what is so important about the ability to keep secrets?

The answer is that leaving Egypt was all about believing and keeping the Word of G-d. The whole purpose of leaving Egypt was to accept the Torah and to believe in the Almighty. When the Master of the Universe tells us to do certain things, we must believe that these things must be done!

Rav Matisyahu Solomon says that one cannot be a believer (ma'amin) unless he is first faithful (ne'eman). One cannot believe in the Word of G-d unless he himself is a person who values a word. If it means nothing when I say something, then when G-d says something, why should I believe it? The more trustworthy a person is and the more meticulous he is about his own words, the more he will be faithful to the Word of the Almighty.

At the beginning of the story of the Exodus, Moshe said: "I know why they are still here - because they can't keep a secret." So what changed to indicate that they were worthy of redemption? When Moshe returned to Egypt many years later, the Almighty trusted them with a secret that they did not reveal. Since they were able to keep that secret, G-d knew that now they could be trusted and be trustworthy and be deserving of redemption.

Since they met their commitment not to reveal the secret of taking the gold and silver out of Egypt, they could be trusted that when G-d told them "I am the L-rd your G-d", His word would mean

something to them as well.

Every Yom Tov has its own mitzvah. The mitzvah of the night of Pesach is to become ma'aminim [believers]. However, in order to become ma'minim, we must first become ne'emanim [trustworthy].

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