

A-14

Norman Lamm

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THE UNSEEN AND THE UNSAID

There is something thrilling and exciting in the first revelation of G-d to Moses about which we read in today's Sidra. It is something which is even more scintillating than the miraculous phenomenon of the burning bush, the *עֵשֶׂת קִדְמוֹתָי*, which Moses perceived so unexpectedly as he was leading his flock near the desert. And that is the profoundly unique reaction of Moses to this vision which he beheld.

One might think that Moses would develop his curiosity about the burning bush, and he would examine it to find out the reason for its unnatural behavior. One might expect that upon hearing the voice of G-d, which, the Rabbis tell us, sounded like the voice of his father Amram, he would be fascinated, and continue to peer at the strange sight; that he would approach it even more closely and carefully inspect this place from whence G-d appeared to him, and, flattered by G-d's choice of him, strive for even greater visions.

Instead, we find that a certain humility overtakes him, a certain self-control, and *וַיִּסְתֵּר מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה*. Moses hides his face, for he dares not look further at this vision of G-d. What a wholesome reaction - and yet how unexpected. Moses shows an unlimited reverence for G-d - he will not delve too deeply, for he knows that there is a mystery to G-d, a secret or secrets which Man dares not seek out, and which he cannot even if he should want to. The root of the word *וַיִּסְתֵּר* is *סתר* - hiddenness, secrecy, mystery. This entire episode is a mysterious one, one which involves *סתר* and *קדמות*.

Our Rabbis tell us that Moses was rewarded for his act of hiding his face and restraining himself from further probing into the mysteries of G-d. *וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת כְּהַנּוּחַ וְאֶת הַיָּדָה*. Because Moses hid his face, he was rewarded with his radiant face. You will recall that at the climax of his career, *וַיִּקְרַע הַשָּׁמַיִם*, rays of glory emanated from the visage of Moses, a halo centered about him. And this radiance was the result of *וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת כְּהַנּוּחַ וְאֶת הַיָּדָה*. The rays of glory emanating from his countenance were the

reflection of something hidden within, something  $\gamma \wedge \delta \rho$ . The outer beauty reflected an inner beauty, an inner secret. For only he who has an inner secret can respect the inner mysteries of another. It is common experience that the gossip, he who peddles the secrets of others, is usually a base fellow, an empty person. The finer person, the person of dignity and grace, is usually the one who will respect the privacy of others. Only because Moses had some great secrets locked up in the chambers of his heart could he reach that high spiritual station where  $\text{וַיִּסְתַּר מִלְּפָנָיו כִּי יִרְאֶה אֱלֹהִים אִלְמָדָה}$ , that out of reverence for G-d and the inviolability of his secret, he hid his face and looked no further, he refused to look at what must be unseen. Such a face must shine gloriously, for it covers a noble heart with sublime secrets.

When we speak of the secret of G-d, we naturally mean religious secrets. We mean that there is a sphere of religious experience and Divine existence which the human mind cannot penetrate. Just as G-d Himself is invisible, unseen by the human eye, so are the faith in G-d and the workings of G-d unseen, largely, by the human mind. The greatness of Moses lay in that, despite his great intellectual curiosity and thirst for knowledge, he could say  $\text{וְעַד הֵרֶם וְעַד הֵרֶם}$ , up to here and no further. The human mind is naturally limited. It cannot grasp all that it wants to grasp. It was Moses, say the Rabbis, who first said the psalm beginning  $\text{וַיִּשְׁכֵּן בְּעִלְיָוִן}$ , "Thou who dwellest in the secrecy of the most high", about which we are told  $\text{וְיִרְאֶה אֱלֹהִים וַיִּחַי}$ , "G-d sees, but is unseen". It is something which modern man, sophisticated to the point of arrogance, will not admit. Modern man, who thinks that he can know anything, thinks that Truth must be obvious. "I'm from Missouri," says 20th century homo sapiens, "If I'll see it I'll believe it".

Judaism, however, has always insisted that there is an unknowable. Let us again refer to G-d's first revelation to Moses. G-d reveals to Moses his name - the YudKayVavKay - and adds,  $\text{וְזֶה שְׁמִי לְעוֹלָם וְזֶה זִמְנִי לְעוֹלָם וְעַד הֵרֶם וְעַד הֵרֶם}$ , "this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations". Interestingly, the Sages point out that the word  $\text{וְעַד הֵרֶם}$ , "forever", is spelt without a VAV -  $\text{וְעַד הֵרֶם}$ ; and that can be read  $\text{וְעַד הֵרֶם}$ , "to conceal". "This is My name forever" becomes "this is My name to be concealed".

What a transformation! And in this the Rabbis find an allusion to the rule that the name of four letters, the Tetragrammaton, the  $\text{קדשן קד}$ , should not be read as it is written, it should not be pronounced. If the belief in G-d is to last  $\text{קדשן קד}$ , unto eternity, then His name should be  $\text{קדשן קד}$ , concealed rather than revealed. There is something hallowed about the concealed, and something usually hollow about the overly revealed. Religion stresses - the unsaid, the unspoken word, even as Moses hid his face for he realized that the burning bush should essentially remain - an unseen sight.

A good part of Judaism and Jewish literature centers about the Kabbalah, which goes under the unfortunate name of mysticism, but which is also known as  $\text{קדשן קדשן}$ , the Science of the Secret. And the Zohar, source book of the Kabbalah, or  $\text{קדשן קדשן}$ , speaks of one aspect of G-d which it calls the  $\text{קדשן קד}$ , the Infinite, the aspect of Himself which G-d never reveals, the  $\text{קדשן קד}$ , G-d as a Hidden Being, the holy unseen. Man is too ignoble, G-d too majestic. There is some level which Man's understanding cannot reach. *even as a congenitally blind man can never conceive of the beauty of color.*

If only our young college men and women would be humble enough to accept this premise! The young intelligencia of our day believe in the invincibility of the human mind. They believe that Reason has unlimited power, and that it is the <sup>standard</sup> ~~only~~ power by which people should live. But, O, if only these young people, who reject faith for text books, would realize how limited human knowledge is! If only they would wake up to the realities around them and see how human knowledge has failed to redeem us. And if they were really interested, they would bother to discover that one of the great principles of Modern Science is the Indeterminacy Principle, the consequence of which is that certain things can never be known! Certainly human reason must be exploited to its fullest - Judaism has always practiced just that - but there most definitely is a  $\text{קדשן קד}$ , a  $\text{קדשן קד}$ , a secret and mystery to life. Moses recognized it <sup>in G-d</sup> when he hid his face and looked no further. And Job, in his final grand soliloquy, recognized it in all of Nature. For if not a mystery, what then is the cell - and the cosmos! If not a secret, what then is love and devotion, and hate and enmity. What is tragedy and what is joy, what is religion and faith if not an elaboration of the great and profound secret of existence itself,

a secret which has its origin in the secret and unseen and unknowable G-d. Moses was humble enough and great enough to recognize this - hence his קוֹסֵף אֵיפֶי, the פִּדְיוֹן יוֹי, the halo, the rays of glory.

This week Jews the world over were shocked to the core of their souls, a shudder ran down every spine, when news was received of one of the greatest scandals since a Hellenistic Jew set up the statue of Jupiter in the פִּלֶּקֶס הַקֶּזֶי of the Second Temple. The Shomer Hatzair, the semi-communist party of Israel, issued a copy of the תַּנְחִיךְ from which they purged every mention of the Name of G-d! They violated the אֵיפֶי, the secret of Jewish life! They have desecrated the very soul of Judaism! They have blackened the halo of Israel! How tragic that where a Moses hides his face and does not even dare look at the Burning Bush out of reverence for its holiness, these scoundrels dare lay thir hands on the Bush, the secret of Israel. It is inevitable that Such hands - - will be burnt.

But this matter of secret is more than a metaphysical idea. Secret involves not only the religious, the unseen, but also the personal, the unsaid. It is a very personal matter. Many times, when you have gained access to some interesting or juicy bit of information, your first impulse is to pick up the telephone and tell it to your friend or neighbor. And how wrong that is! For every person must have a secret which he reveals to no other. Not having a secret means not having individuality, and not being endowed with individuality means being a person without personality. A person who has a secret is thereby set apart from the masses. Without one, he is no longer unique, he becomes a mere carbon copy of the human form. He is like any manufactured article, a pencil for instance, which, being mass produced, is no different from thousands of others like it. When you have said everything you have reduced yourself to nothing. A person who has a secret, like Moses, is a person who has a פִּדְיוֹן אֵיפֶי, a halo, or in modern terms, a distinctive personality; for there is something in him that is unsaid.

The other day, while rereading some of the classics of our English Literature, I came across an enchanting <sup>passage</sup> from Oscar Wilde's "Dorian Gray". Wilde's artist speaks as follows:

"When I like people immensely, I never tell their names to anyone. It is like surrendering a part of them. It seems to me the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvelous to us. The commonest thing is delightful if only one hides it. When I leave town now, I never tell my people where I'm going. If I did, I would lose all my pleasure".

How we need to hear words like that! For this is the Age of Publicity, the Era of Diary Writers, when a secret is no longer a secret, when nothing is left unsaid. The temptation to tell all has actually endangered our national security - even military secrets are no longer safe, for even well-intentioned people have forgotten the art of secrecy. It has come to the point where even a Loyalty Board, investigating just such leaks, is no longer able to prevent its own members from "leaking" its own secrets!

היה זה

And the secrets of married life -how they have been violated by our newspapers. The Gossip Column, or "keyhole reporting", has progressed from a tolerated impertinency to an art to a science! Marriage should mean that two people share their secrets and personalities, that they respect and enhance their mutual secrets and keep them sacred! Instead, what we have is a vulgarity and shamelessness unrivaled by any other society. For our papers headline the most intimate - and I might add, immoral - details of the marital lives of prominent people. And they are read and repeated by the people with the greatest of glee. America, it seems, has succumbed to the creeping disease of Winchelititis. A society of this sort can have no <sup>קיום</sup> for there is no <sup>אמת</sup>. Judaism has always emphasized <sup>אמונה</sup>, the keeping of secrets, hiddenness, chastity,

modesty. Said the old Reb Yushe Ber, <sup>אם לא ידעו אדם אדם לא ידעו אדם אדם</sup>

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If we follow that advice and respect the secrets of people, our civilization might some

day have a <sup>אור</sup>, a radiance and the warmth of dignified glory.

OUT - NO TIME

And what we Jews haven't done to charity! Charity among Jews was always shrouded in secrecy. There was a room in the <sup>Temple</sup> ~~Temple~~, tells us the Talmud, called the פיקלן זאל the Hall of Secrecy. In here the donor would quietly deposit his contribution and leave, and then a poor man would enter as quietly and take what he needs, unknown to the donor. Both would perform their tasks secretly. This was not announced five times over again as is done today. If you want evidence of the degeneration which the Mitzvah of נדב 3 has undergone with so many of us today, look at the Yiddish papers any day of the week. There you will see an unequalled vulgarity; you will see certain pictures reprinted with disgusting regularity. There is no secret about who gives and how much he gives and to whom he gives. And there is no secret that the reward is cheap publicity. There is nothing, O nothing, unsaid. Here are people who destroy a Mitzvah by vulgarity; people who sell a פ'ינא פ'ינא to see their own פ'ינא, their photos in the papers. What a crying need for פ'ינא פ'ינא פ'ינא.

Longfellow once wrote:

"Not in the clamor of the crowded street, / Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,  
 " But in ourselves are triumph and defeat"

A very great truth, Mr. Longfellow. But many years before you there was an old man called the Prophet Elijah, who was inspired by the lesson of our Teacher, Moses, who was able to hide his face and respect a secret; and this man Elijah recognized that:

... ד' איז נישט אין די ווינלעך ... ד' איז נישט אין די פארעם פון די פארעם ... ד' איז נישט אין די פארעם פון די פארעם

G-d is not in the howling wind, not in the volcanic earthquake, not in the roaring fire; G-d is revealed in the small still voice, in the unenunciated opinion and the unexpressed idea; in the unarticulated thought and the unspoken word; in the unseen - - and the unsaid.