

Secret Sins (Ki Tavo)

“The secret thoughts of a man run over all things, holy, profane, clean, obscene, grave, and light, without shame or blame.” —Thomas Hobbes

There is a special place in Jewish theology for the secret sinner. Moses commands the people of Israel to perform an unusual ceremony once they cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Half the tribes are to stand on one mountain and half on the opposite mountain, while a series of curses is proclaimed before the entire nation. The selection and content of the curses are striking. For example: Cursed is the one who makes an idol in secret. Cursed is the one who strikes his parents. Cursed is the one who is intimate with a relative. Cursed is the one who misleads the blind on the road. (See the full list in Deuteronomy 27:15-26.)

Ibn Ezra on Deuteronomy 27:14 explains that the common denominator is that these are sins which can often be committed in secret. A person may appear respected and righteous to everyone around him, while concealing behavior that tells a very different story. The problem is not only the individual wrongdoing, but the divided life it creates.

There is something corrosive about maintaining two versions of oneself, one presented to the world and another carefully hidden from it. The secret sin can slowly erode a person's integrity from within, creating a growing distance between who he appears to be and who he knows himself to be.

Wholeness begins by closing that distance, confronting what has been hidden and breaking free of the behavior that required secrecy in the first place.

Good luck to all of us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the recent Israeli study which finds a link between religious observance, a stronger sense of purpose, and better mental health:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11469-026-01699-z>