

What are the "revealed" things? The world, as it is revealed to our senses. The stars, planets, and details of the creation are revealed. The nature of life, its origin and evolution, is revealed. Human behavior, too, is subject to scientific scrutiny. Far from discouraging exploration, the text instead shouts out to us to pursue what is revealed with all our artistic and intellectual skills, emphasizing with a dramatic series of dots over the Torah-text letters that the revealed things "belong to us and our children forever." Tikkun olam includes this imperative for inquiry.

What, then, are the "secret" things? I don't know. They should be secret in identity as well as in content. Perhaps superficially they have something to do with the "unknowable": mysteries of God, or death, or the particulars of evil. Or, since our interpretations of the revealed are inherently incomplete, perhaps the secret things refer to deeper explanations that we will only discover in the future. As R. Yehudah intimates in discussing this passage (*San. 43b*), in the right place and time the secret things become revealed.

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The full verse in Deuteronomy adds the words: to observe all the words of this instruction." Rabbi Benjamin Szold, father of Henrietta Szold, read the verse following the Torah trop divisions: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, and the revealed; but it is for us and our children forever to observe all the words of this instruction."

In this reading, both the hidden and revealed are in God's hands to interpret, understand, judge, and punish, while our job is solely to observe all the words of the Torah. Before our ancestors even crossed the Jordan, they took upon themselves a sacred commitment equal to any in human history. They not only promised that they would take personal responsibility for observing all the words in the Torah, but astonishingly, promised that every generation to follow them, forever, would do the same.

And here we are, their children, still learning "this instruction." This is not a miracle of smoke and mirrors, but the outcome of a strong educational system and a value of learning Torah that has been passed down literally from generation to generation. It is a sacred responsibility to educate the next generation in Torah and mitzvot. How is our generation doing?

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How can we assign those worries to God? And in doing so do we only push them, as the Torah advises, away? Maybe not. We read in Jeremiah 13:17 God's own lament, *b'mistarim tivkeh nafshi mipnei geivah*. "My inmost self, hidden self, must weep because of your arrogance."

הנסתרת לה אלהינו והנגלת לנו ולבנינו עד-עולם
לעשות את-כל-דברי התורה הזאת: דברים כט:כח

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but that which has been revealed is ours and our children's forever. Devarim 29:28

We fear most what is concealed from us. The troubles that actually confront us — even events that shock us with the enormity of their unprecedented cruelty — are most often dwarfed by those we only dare, trembling, to imagine. The Torah advises us to assign those worries to God, getting on instead with the business of life.

The "secret things" of which the Torah speaks may be intentions and meanings: we cannot fathom the reasons for events in our world, we are told, but we do know how we must respond. Just as God is gracious and caring with individuals (our biblical antecedents, for example), so are we to devote ourselves to assuaging the sufferings of others.

Alternatively, the "secret things" may be hidden actions. One ancient version takes the verse to mean that concealed sins are known to God, who will punish them; our mandate is to apply the standards of justice to evident transgressions. Failure to punish evildoers is not just destructive of the social order; it is a moral collapse of the greatest magnitude.

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The Talmud (*Hagigah 5b*) comments that "God has a place and it is called *mistarim*" and it is there that God goes to cry, driven by human arrogance. (Is not humility the root of all good and arrogance the root of all evil?). So God cries in His hidden place. Writing in the Warsaw Ghetto, Rav Kalonymous Shapira cited this line of Talmud and said that if we were able ourselves to feel God's sorrow even for a moment the world would explode.

No wound, or pain, is ever truly forgotten or lost; all are gathered into His hidden place to await redemption. You see, God takes the cries unto Himself to free us for action, so that we can get on with the urgent, daily, mundane (if ultimately sacred) tasks of tending the sick, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. And beating back the murderers whose arrogance makes God cry.

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*NiSh'ma is the Hebrew word for "let us hear."