**The Secret to Keeping a Secret**



**#1**

A. In his controversial memoir “Duty,” former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates reveals private conversations with President Obama and other politicians. On one hand, this seems to be a betrayal of trust; Gates is revealing information that was told to him in confidence. On the other hand, this revelation does give the American people important information about their leadership. In a republic, this is certainly needed.

**Question: What are your thoughts about it?**

B. After I taught my students about the importance of avoiding waste, they decided to organize a protest against wasteful practices at the school. They asked me to keep their secret in order to maximize the impact of their protest, but I have an obligation to my employer to inform them of disruptions.

**Question: Should I respect their request?**

C. You are waiting for your friend in her office when you notice an open letter written by your brother to your friend.

**Question: Will you peek into it?**

D. Sam is on the phone with his boss, his voice is very nervous.

**Question: Will you come closer to listen to find out what is going on?**

E. Your friend tells you he is considering suicide, but swears you to secrecy.

**Question: Do you keep the secret, or break his trust to get him help?**

**#2**

**Pirkei Avos 1:6**

*… Acquire for yourself a friend ...*

**Rabbeinu Yonah**

*A person needs three things from a good friend.*

*(3) … and to be his confidante. Since he is his ally, he will not reveal his secrets to others ...*

**Question: Why would you want to tell your secret to someone?**

**#3**

**Orchos Chaim of the Rosh 41**

*The extent of the severity of revealing secrets cannot be overemphasized.*

**Talmud Sanhedrin 31a**

*Rabbi Ami expelled a student from the study hall because he had disclosed the details of a confidential discussion that had taken place in the study hall 22 years prior, saying, “This man reveals secrets.”*

**Bamidbar Rabbah 20:21**

*In the merit of four things the Jews were redeemed from Egypt—they did not change their names; they did not change their language; they did not disclose each other's secrets; and they did not break barriers of morality.*

**Question: What is so great about being able to keep secrets?**

**#4**

**Mishlei 11:13**

*One who goes along slandering reveals secrets but the faithful protect them.*

**Question: What is the connection between keeping a secret and not slandering, gossiping?**

**#5**

**Question: Are there secrets that need to be revealed?**



**#6**

Exceptions:

**Chofetz Chaim, Be’er Mayim Chaim, Laws of Lashon Harah (Evil Speech) 2:27**

*If no apparent harm will be caused by revealing the conversation, and there was no indication that the content was intended to remain confidential (e.g. the conversation was not conducted in a hushed tone or secluded area), while it still may be laudable to not reveal the information, there is no prohibition to do so.*

**Tzitz Eliezer 15:13**

*A doctor who has information about a condition that may put the public at risk (such as severely impaired vision or a contagious disease) must share his knowledge with the appropriate parties—even if the patient specifically requests that he keep it a secret. In fact, if the doctor withholds the information, he may be guilty of the Biblical prohibition, “Do not stand by [the shedding of] your fellow’s blood.”*

**Chafetz Chaim in Be’er Mayim Chaim, Laws of Slander 9:1-3.**

*Under certain conditions, one can reveal private information that will save someone from financial losses.*

**Chafetz Chaim, Laws of Lashon Harah (Evil Speech) 4:10-11**

*If a person is sharing the negative information for a constructive and beneficial purpose, the prohibition against doing so does not apply. For example, if you are asked for information about a potential spouse or employee, and you know information that would prevent serious harm (e.g. the potential groom has an extremely bad temper, or the employee is a thief), you are permitted to reveal this information.*

*In such a situation that the information may be revealed, the one asking for the private information should stress that he is not asking out of curiosity, but for a specific constructive reason; namely, he is thinking of making a match or hiring the person.*

*Additionally, when answering, take care to keep in mind that one is only permitted to reveal the information for a constructive and beneficial purpose, but not out of malicious intent. This means being careful not to reveal more than what is necessary, and it goes without saying that any exaggeration is prohibited.*

**#7**

**Question: What advice would you give to learn how to keep secrets?**

**#8**

**Question: What is your takeaway from today's discussion?**