

# Gossip and God - Beha'alotcha

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Rabbi Marina Yergin

Based on a sheet by Sari Laufer

במדבר י"ב:ד'-ה'

(ד) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה פְּתָאֵם אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־מִרְיָם צֵאוּ שְׁלֹשְׁתֵּיכֶם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁלֹשְׁתָּם: (ה) וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן וַיַּעֲמֵד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּקְרָא אֶהְרֹן וּמִרְיָם וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמַעוּ־נָא דְבַר יְהוָה אֲנִי־יְהוָה נִבְיֵאֲכֶם יְהוָה בְּמִרְאֵה אֱלֹהֵי אֲתוֹדֵעַ בְּחִלּוֹם אֲדַבֵּר־בּוֹ: (ז) לֹא־כֵן עֲבַדְתִּי מִשָּׁה בְּכָל־בֵּיתִי נְאֻמָּן הוּא: (ח) כִּי אֶל־כָּפֹה אֲדַבֵּר־בּוֹ וּמִרְאֵה וְלֹא בְחֵידוֹת וּתְמִנַת יְהוָה יִבִּיט וּמִדּוֹעַ לֹא יֵרְאֶתְּם לְדַבֵּר בְּעַבְדֵי בְּמִשָּׁה:

## Numbers 12:4-8

(4) Suddenly יהוה *Adonai* called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting.” So the three of them went out. (5) יהוה *Adonai* came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, “Aaron and Miriam!” The two of them came forward; (6) and [God] said, “Hear these My words: When prophets of יהוה *Adonai* arise among you, I make Myself known to them in a vision, I speak with them in a dream. (7) Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. (8) With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of יהוה *Adonai*. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!”

## Who is God talking to? Why? In what manner?

### Rashi<sup>1</sup> on Numbers 12:4:2

**Come out, you three....** The three of them were separately summoned with a single Divine utterance—something impossible to ordinary speech or hearing.

### Ramban<sup>2</sup> on Numbers 12:4:1

The sense of the word “suddenly” is that they did not direct their minds towards or intend to receive a Divine communication at that time, it being in honor of Moses that it came to them without any preparation for it; for the word *pith'om* (suddenly) in the opinion of the commentators [as explained in Ibn Ezra] applies to something which one did not think of, from the root *pethi* (simple-minded). Therefore Scripture uses the term *pith'om* [only] on account of Aaron and Miriam, for Moses our teacher was fit for a Divine communication at any time, and his mind was prepared to cleave to *the Glorious Name* at every moment....

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105) was a medieval French rabbi and author.

<sup>2</sup> Nachmanides, or RAMBAN, (1194-1270) was a Sephardic Rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist, and biblical commentator.

### Rashi on Numbers 12:5:2-3

**The two of them came forward:** Why did God call them forward, separating them from Moses? One should praise a man only partially if he is present to hear; behind his back, one may praise him fully....

**What do we learn from this idea of gossip? How is it talked about in other spaces?**

### Arakhin 15b

...**The Holy One, Blessed be He said to the tongue: All the other limbs of a person are upright, but you are lying horizontally. All the other limbs of a person are external, but you are internal. And moreover, I have surrounded you with two walls, one of bone, i.e., the teeth, and one of flesh, the lips....In the West, Eretz Yisrael, they say: Third speech, i.e., malicious speech about a third party, kills three people. It kills the one who speaks malicious speech, and the one who accepts the malicious speech when he hears it, and the one about whom the malicious speech is said. Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, says: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Death and life are in the hand of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21). Does the tongue have a hand? Rather the verse comes to tell you that just as a hand can kill, so too a tongue can kill. If you were to claim that just as the hand kills only from close by, so too the tongue kills only from close by, therefore the verse states: “Their tongue is a sharpened arrow” (Jeremiah 9:7). The tongue kills like an arrow that is fired from a bow, at a great distance. If you say that just as an arrow can kill only within the distance it can be shot, which is up to about forty or fifty cubits, so too a tongue can kill only from up to forty or fifty cubits, therefore the verse teaches: “They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth” (Psalms 73:9). This teaches that malicious speech can reach great distances, even the distance between heaven and earth....**