

Names of Nobility: Parshat Shemot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The book of Shemot begins with a list of names of the members of Yaakov's family who descended to Egypt. This list seems to repeat the list in the book of Bereishit. The list in our *parsha* end with the words, "And Joseph was in Egypt." Why was it necessary to repeat this?

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that understanding the name of a person or a thing helps us focus on its purpose. The Gemara interprets the verse in *Tehillim*, "Asher sam shamot ba'aretz," to mean that if a person does not live up to his name and his potential, he will bring destruction to the land.

Names have two interconnected components writes the Dorash Dovid: the definition of the name; and the mental, psychological and emotional intention of the parents when they gave the child this name. Just as a child inherits physical attributes from his parents, so he inherits these other attributes from his parents. A person is influenced by the two meanings in developing the attributes of his name. One's name includes both a legacy and a mindset. Our Matriarchs articulated the reasons they gave their children their names. The names included the essence of each person.

When the Torah lists the names of these souls as they descended to Egypt, it teaches us that they invested themselves with the ability to

retain their innate holy essence, even as they physically moved to the immoral society of Egypt, explains Rabbi Gifter. We all have this ability to actualize our holy potential, no matter where we are and no matter the challenges we face. When the Torah then records that Yosef was in Egypt, adds Rabbi Weinberger, it teaches us that Yosef retained the holy essence of his name the whole time he lived in Egypt.

The verse in Kohelet says, "A good name is better than oil, and the day of death than the day of birth." Oil alludes to wisdom. Unlike emotions which are volatile, wisdom is unchangeable and constant. This is true of a person's name too. Klal Yisroel retained their names because they let their *chochma* control their emotions. A person who can maintain clarity of purpose by using wisdom can maintain the integrity of his name.

The Shla"h Hakadosh introduced a custom for a person to recite a verse representative of his name at the end of the silent *Amidah*. He intended this custom to help keep a person focused on his mission in life. At death, you will be asked your name, you will be asked if you lived up to the essence your name signified. Yosef never changed his name and never forgot his mission, even though Paro gave him an Egyptian name. He made sure his head ruled his heart and his passions.

The Lev Shalom notes that Bnei Yisroel are compared to stars that Hashem brings out and returns individually by name. When Bnei Yisroel descended into exile, as related in Parshat Vayigash, the Torah recorded their names. One would think that the names would be recorded again at the actual exodus from Egypt rather than here, at the beginning of the enslavement. In fact, the suffering was so severe that the predicted 400 years of enslavement was shortened to 210 years. When our personal troubles seem overwhelming, perhaps Hashem is speeding up our redemption and salvation. In fact, the *galut*, the exile, is part of revelation, of *hitgalut*. Our names reveal to us our potential, and challenge us to work to fulfill that potential so we will be ready for redemption.

When Bnei Yisroel retained their names, they not only held on to their past, they also kept the vision of the future, writes the Ohr Gedaliah. They kept the revealed essence of their names and the hidden essence contained in their names, which connected them to Hashem. In this way they were able to focus on bringing their potential to fruition and speed the redemption. Through creating a manifestation of his name on earth, man has the potential of bringing the glory of Heaven to earth. By living up to his name, he can merit salvation.

Parshat Shemot: The Three Signs of Moshe Rabbeinu

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Parshat Shemot relates a difficult dialogue between Moshe and Hashem. For a week, Moshe resisted Hashem's mission to take the Jews out of Egypt. He argued that the Jews would ask for Hashem's name. Hashem said, "Tell them, *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*." Moshe then countered that the Jews would not believe him. Hashem tells him to show them three signs.

The Shem MiShmuel asks several questions. If the Jews did not believe him, shouldn't Moshe have first shown them the signs and then told them Hashem's name? Additionally, they had a tradition that Hashem would redeem them. Why wouldn't they know who

Hashem was? Why did they need to hear his name? Furthermore, if Hashem told Moshe that the Jews would believe him, how could Moshe contradict Him?

The Shem MiShmuel explains that Hashem created the world with *din* (judgment) and *chesed* (mercy). Sometimes he is merciful and sometimes he is strict. When Moshe told the Jews that they would be redeemed, they claimed they had a tradition from Avraham that the exile would last 400 years and only 210 years had passed. Additionally, they argued that according to *din* they did not deserve

redemption because they had committed evil deeds and worshipped idols. Moshe answered that Hashem would go beyond *din* and rational justification, and would utilize his *midda* of *chesed* to redeem them.

What a lesson this is for us. Chazal say that the Jews were at the 49th level of impurity. If not for Hashem's *chesed*, the Jews would have never been redeemed. *Chesed* was the core seed that led to the exodus from Egypt and our creation as a people. Sometimes as parents or spouses, justice tells us not to act with

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kindness. Yet Hashem, the model of *chesed*, enjoins us to go beyond our call of duty.

the paradox of *din* and *chesed*.

The *gemara* lists seven names of Hashem. Six of these names represent different levels of *din*, *tzimtzum* or confinement. The four letter essential name of Hashem signifies *chesed*. The closer we get to the essence of Hashem the more *chesed* we discover. A great part of our Torah is *din*, but our primary relationship with Hashem is *chesed*. The Shem MiShmuel explains that Moshe asked Hashem what the foundation of the salvation will be. Hashem answered, "*Ehyeh...*," meaning, I will redeem them with *chesed*. The Egyptians, however, would be punished with *din*. Moshe then countered that the Jews would be confused at

Hashem said he would give Moshe three signs that would demonstrate that *din* and *chesed* can function together. When Moshe put his hand in his bosom it became leprous. When he put his hand back in, it returned to normal. In the regular course of nature, leprosy takes weeks to heal. *Din* is connected to time. *Chesed* is beyond time.

The transformation of water into blood represented *chesed* on an elevated level. The sign intimated that Hashem would accept one good deed performed with blood and fire. This one act would erase all their many bad deeds. This

was the *korban pesach*, which connected the Jewish nation with Hashem and helped them merit the redemption.

For the third sign, Moshe threw down his stick and turned it into a snake. He then picked up the snake by its tail and it turned back into a stick. The snake signifies the poison of idolatry. Moshe hinted to the Jews that if they would just stop worshipping idols (discard the snake), they would allow good to come rushing in (it would turn into a stick).

The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt with *chesed*, and the ultimate redemption will come with *chesed*.

Mesillat Yesharim: Alacrity in Our Service of G-d

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Torah says, "*U'shmartem et hamatzot*. On a simple level this means one must watch the *matzot* and prepare the dough swiftly so that it doesn't become *chametz*. Chazal however read this verse, "*U'shmartem et hamitzvot*," teaching us to perform *mitzvot* with *zerizut* (alacrity). Just as one who bakes *matzot* works quickly so the dough will not become *chametz*, one who has the opportunity to do a *mitzvah* should run swiftly to do it for fear of losing the opportunity. Much like someone racing to get to the bank on time, one should race to grab a *mitzvah*. Although there's a *halacha* that one shouldn't run on Shabbat, the Gemara says one may do so to perform a *mitzvah*.

Klal Yisrael left Egypt *b'chipazon* (in haste) at the exact point in time that Hashem intended them to leave. *Zerizut* too is the mindset, "The boss is waiting. Now is the time meant to do this particular *mitzvah*. Later, there may be other *mitzvot*." A *masmid* (diligent person) is not defined by how many hours he learns but by the way every moment of his day is accounted for.

The Torah describes the details of how

Avraham ran to prepare food for his guests and how Rivkah quickly drew up water for Eliezer and the camels. The Torah teaches us that *zerizut* doesn't only apply to matters of great consequence, but to minor every day actions too. Chazal say all the deeds of *tzadikim* are swift. The Midrash tells us how Klal Yisrael brought all the necessary materials needed for the *mishkan* to Moshe on Chanukah. Moshe put them away until Nissan, when they begin to erect the *mishkan*. Chazal explain that *zerizut*, being ready early, is an indication of enthusiasm for a *mitzvah*. This is why the *Mishkan*, unlike the *Beis Hamikdash*, was hidden away. The firm foundation of *zerizut* that it was built on prevented it from being destroyed. Klal Yisrael at their very essence are *zerizim*, having inherited the genes of passion and desire for *mitzvot* from our forefathers. Rav Yehuda ben Taima said, "*Ratz ka'zvi... lasot ratzon avicha she'basha-mayim*." Run like a deer... to do the will of your Father in heaven. The Gemara says the reward for learning Torah is running to the *beit midrash* to study. Although one may not understand anything being taught, one receives reward for the alacrity and desire one

shows for learning. It's not the end result that counts but the attitude and effort a person puts in.

How can one acquire *zerizut*? If a person thinks about all the kindness Hashem has done for him throughout the years he will feel so indebted, he'll look for any way to please his Maker. Even a poor person who has nothing, must feel thankful for his existence. The Gemara says that if one doesn't perform *mitzvot* with *zerizut*, one's wife may die. We learn this from Yehuda who said, "*Mah betza*. What will we gain by killing him?" He had in mind to save Yosef after he was thrown in the pit, but he lacked *zerizut* and didn't follow through. Subsequently his wife and children died. When a person commits himself to do a *mitzvah*, it is as if he takes upon himself a *neder* (vow). He's given life to fulfill his commitments and if he doesn't, life is taken away from him.

Zerizut, doing *mitzvot* with passion and joy, brings a person closer to Hashem. May we merit to ascend higher in our *avodat Hashem*.