

Parshas Shmos

For the week ending 21 Teves 5756
12 & 13 January 1996

Summary

With the death of Yosef, the era of the Avos and the Book of *Bereishis* (Genesis) come to an end. The Book of *Shmos* (Exodus) now chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews in Egypt, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate continues to increase, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all baby boys. *Yocheved* gives birth to *Moshe* and places him in a basket in the Nile before anyone can kill him. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts the baby even though she realizes he is probably a Hebrew. *Miriam*, Moshe's older sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe. She arranges for his mother *Yocheved* to be his nursemaid and help raise him. Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and Moshe kills the Egyptian. When Moshe realizes his life is in danger, he flees to Midian where he rescues *Tzipporah*, whose father *Yisro* approves their subsequent marriage. In *Chorev*, Moshe witnesses the "burning bush" where Hashem commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*, which Hashem has promised to their ancestors. Moshe protests that the Jewish People in Egypt will doubt him being Hashem's agent, and so Hashem helps Moshe perform three miraculous transformations to validate him in the eyes of the people: Changing his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker Hashem tells him that his brother *Aaron* will be his spokesman. Aaron greets Moshe on his return to Egypt, and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before, but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but Hashem assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave.

With these names they came, and with these names they left - their essence and their identity unaltered in any way.

Commentaries

WHAT'S IN A NAME

"And these are the names of the Children of Yisrael that came to Egypt..." (1:1)

There was once a Jew who wanted very much to join a certain golf club. The only problem was that this golf club didn't accept Jews. Undeterred, he changed his name, and took every conceivable precaution to conceal his Jewishness. A week after he submitted his application, he was very disappointed to receive a polite but firm rejection from the club. "I don't understand what went wrong" he complained to a friend. "My name doesn't sound Jewish. And on the

application form, under where it said 'Religion' I even wrote 'Gentile'...!" One of the reasons that the Jewish People deserved to be redeemed from Egypt was that they didn't change their names. But why was this

considered something so important that it gained them deliverance from Egypt?

The name of a thing defines its essence. When *Adam HaRishon* gave names to every creature, he understood that creature's individual essence and was able to express this in a name.

Similarly, later in this week's Parsha, when Hashem commands Moshe to bring out the Jewish People from Egypt, Moshe says to Hashem "...They (the Jewish People) will say to me 'What is His (Hashem's) Name?' What shall I answer them?" In other words, if they ask me to define the essence of The Creator - what His name is - what do I answer them?

Obviously, Hashem is above all definition. Man can have no idea or concept of the real essence of The Creator. We can only know that **there is a Creator**. And that is precisely what Hashem answered to Moshe.

(continued on reverse)

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel
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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

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"I will be that Which I will be." - My essence is the fact that I exist, I have always existed and I will always exist. That is My essence. That is My Name. That's what 'not changing their names' means: *The Children of Israel didn't change their essence. They didn't lose their identity.* Even in the depths of exile they never stopped feeling that their essence - their total *gestalt* was Jewish. Right at the beginning of the Book of Shmos the Torah tells us " *These are the names of the Children of Israel...*" - With these names they came and with these names they left - their essence and their identity unaltered in any way.

(Based on L'Torah U'Imoadim by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

It changes all the time...

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THE PRINCE OF PROPHETS

"And a man from the House of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi..." (2:1)

When writing about the union of Moshe Rabbeinu's parents why didn't the Torah just say " *And Amram went and took Yocheved*"?

In his lifetime Moshe Rabbeinu achieved a closeness to Hashem unequalled by any other human being. He alone ascended to heaven and received the Torah for Yisrael. He alone spoke to Hashem, face to face, with crystal clarity, unlike all other prophets who saw but through a glass darkly. There was a concern that, in the course of time, someone might say that Moshe himself really came from heaven, and make him into a god. For this reason, the Torah stresses, even before his birth, that his origin was as normal and earthly as any Jew, for " *a man from the House of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi.*" Although Moshe Rabbeinu was the prince of prophets, his parents were regular flesh and blood. A 'man' and a 'daughter.'

(Adapted from Kehilas Yitzchak in Iturei Torah)

Haftorah: Yishayahu 27:6-8:13, 29:22-23

THE REVOLUTION THAT WENT WRONG

"To whom shall one teach knowledge, who can be made to understand a message. Those weaned from (mother's) milk, removed from the breasts!" (28:10)

Since the time of the Industrial Revolution we have witnessed an ever-accelerating development of science and technology. As the Holy *Zohar* predicted, from the year 5600 the gates of wisdom were opened. If the Jewish People had been worthy, this tremendous outpouring of knowledge would have found its proper home in the wisdom of Torah and holiness. Now, since we were not worthy, this diffusion of higher energy has found its way to the superficial wisdoms and precipitated the invention of weapons of mass destruction to humanity's profound loss.

From the day that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, 'prophecy was given to fools and infants.' Meaning, that when Yisrael dwelled in the Holy Land, celestial energy, both spiritual and material, descended to its correct landing place. However, since the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, this spiritual radiance has gone astray - descending on desolate lands and unsuitable people - "fools and infants." This is what the prophet means when he asks whether "those weaned from (mother's) milk" can be "made to understand a message."

(Adapted from Ahavas Yonason and Rabbi Bunem M'Pshisch)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Baruch Kel Elyon - ilgkt lrc

"...And He shall seek out Zion, the outcast city."

The reason given by our Sages for a number of religious practices in our post-Temple times is *szecher I'Mikdash* - a desire to remember how things were done when we had a Beis Mikdash in Zion. The importance of recalling Zion in its spiritual glory is found in the words of the Prophet Jeremiah (30:17) who bemoans Jerusalem - Zion - as an "outcast city" because no one cares enough to seek her. In this song we turn to "Kel Elyon" - the Most Exalted G-d - and confess that all our efforts to seek out Zion are only symbolic and that it is He alone who can effectively "seek out Zion" and end its isolation as "the outcast city."

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