



# Parshas Shmos

For the week ending 21 Teves 5759  
8 - 9 January 1999

## Overview

**W**ith the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishis (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shmos (Exodus) 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, 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. 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 Tziporah, whose father Yisro approves of their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mt. Sinai), 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 his being Hashem's agent, and so Hashem enables Moshe to 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 Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon 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 Jews leave.

## Insights

THE BOOK OF NAMES

**“And they will say to me: What is His Name?” (3:13)**

**T**his week we start reading the Book of *Shmos*, the “Book of Names.” Really, however, the entire Torah is a Book of Names.

The Torah existed before the creation of the universe. In its primordial form, the Torah's “letters” were black fire on a “parchment” of white fire. When G-d dictated the Torah to Moshe, Moshe wrote it like a scribe copying an ancient text of fire. Until this dictation, the Torah only existed as a series of letters in a sequence which could have been broken up into different words and different sentences, with an entirely different meaning. Thus, the primordial Torah was the “DNA of existence,” containing every potential existential scenario. The Torah that Moshe wrote down was the scenario that was actualized.

Something else: The entire Torah from its beginning — “*In the beginning*” — until its final words — “*before the eyes of all Yisrael*” — is no more than names of G-d, one after the other after the other.

How can G-d have a name? A name defines. Definition limits. *This* cannot be *that*. Something with a name is by definition separate from everything else. Isn't saying that G-d has a name an impossible contradiction to His Oneness?

The Torah is the blueprint of creation. Really, however, it is more than the blueprint. It is the *means* by which things exist. An architect's blueprint is inanimate. The Torah is dynamic. The source of all existence is rooted either explicitly or covertly in the Torah.

On the infinite level, G-d has no name. When we talk of G-d having names, we mean that His names are the way that He relates to His creation. The Torah is the life-source of everything that exists *because* it is the names of G-d. The Torah, the blueprint and the dynamo of creation,

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necessarily must consist of G-d's names, for nothing can exist unless He wills it to exist; and His connection to this world is through His names.

Nothing can have existence unless it is written in the Torah, which is no more than G-d's names, one after another...

#### *A JEW BY ANY OTHER NAME...*

### ***“And these are the names of the Children of Israel that came to Egypt” (1:1)***

**T**here 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 took every conceivable precaution to conceal his Jewishness and even changed his name. 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," he complained to a friend. "My name doesn't sound Jewish. And on the application form, under where it said *Religion*, I even wrote 'non-Jew!' "

One reason that the Jewish People deserved to be redeemed from Egypt was that they didn't change their names. Why was this so important?

The name of a thing defines its essence. When Adam 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 G-d commands Moshe to lead the Jewish People out of Egypt, Moshe says to G-d "*They will say to me 'What is His (G-d'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?

G-d is above definition. Man can have no concept of the real essence of the Creator. We can only know that there is a Creator. And that is precisely what G-d answered Moshe: "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 Jewish People didn't change their essence. They didn't lose their identity. Even in the depths of exile they never stopped feeling that their essence 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.

#### *THE SINGER NOT THE SONG*

### ***“He kissed him” (4:27)***

**R**abbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, one of the great Torah leaders of the previous generation, disliked eulogies which contained stories about the deceased. "It's the man that makes the story, not the story that makes the man" he said. Even the simplest actions of the great bespeak volumes.

In this week's Parsha, G-d tells Aharon to go out and meet his brother Moshe. The Torah reports "He kissed him" without telling us who kissed whom. Nachmanides tells us that it was Aharon who kissed Moshe. Although Moshe hadn't seen Aharon for many years and wanted to embrace his brother, yet Moshe, the humblest of all men, did not want to be so presumptuous as to initiate the embrace. Moshe was 80 years old, yet when it came to Aharon, he still saw himself as nothing more than Aharon's younger brother.

The S'forno agrees with Nachmanides that it was Aharon who kissed Moshe, but for a different reason. He says Aharon kissed Moshe because Moshe was holy, just as one would kiss a Torah Scroll.

A simple story of a simple kiss. An event that happens every day. It's the man that makes the story, not the story that makes the man.

#### *LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT*

### ***“Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro.” (3:1)***

**T**here's no such thing as a small action by a great person. The smallest action of someone great reveals his greatness.

Moshe was a shepherd. One day, a lamb from his flock was weak from lack of water. Moshe picked up the lamb and carried it on his shoulders until he reached the spring. He placed the lamb down and gave it water from the spring. Moses was alone in the wilderness. No one was watching. No one to applaud his kindness to the lamb.

The way a person acts when no one is watching shows his essence. Moshe's essence was compassion. If Moshe showed such compassion for an animal, how much more would be his compassion for the Jewish People! Thus, Moshe merited to be the shepherd of the Jewish People.

Sources:

*The Book Of Names* - Ramban, *Sefer Bereishis* 1:1

*A Jew By Any Other Name* - Rabbi S.Y. Zevin

*The Singer - Not The Song* - Rabbi Mordechai Perلمان

*Little Things That Count* - Rabbi Mordechai Perلمان

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## **Parshas** *Shmos*

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## Haftorah: Yishayahu 27:6-28:13, 29:22-23

SUE ME / SUE YOU

**“Has He struck at Israel as He struck those who struck him? Or has He slain him as He slew those who slew him? According to its measure (of sin), He contended...” (27:6, 8)**

**D**amaging someone's reputation can be more expensive than damaging his Cadillac. Remuneration for the damage to someone's reputation is difficult for courts to calculate, but one thing is sure, a person of great status who is insulted and loses status will be awarded much more damages than someone who is a street-bum.

Once, there was a rich man who was angered by a certain pauper. The altercation came to a head when the rich man slapped the poor man in the face in public. Shortly afterward, the poor man got a job. It turned out that he was extremely adept at his task and rose through the ranks to be second-in-command of the business. Encouraged by his success, he started a business on his own. The business grew and grew as the years passed and he became fabulously wealthy.

Ironically, the rich man's fortunes waned in almost direct proportion to the waxing of the fortunes of the poor man.

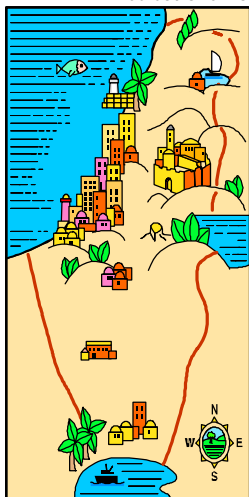
When the “poor” man reached the pinnacle of his success, he sued the “rich” man for the insulting slap that he had been forced to endure all those years previously. The court deliberated the cause and fined the “rich” man a sum which would take him many years to pay, if at all. The “rich” man complained, saying “This is a ridiculous amount of money. When I hit him he was no more than a pauper.” “True,” said the judge. “However, the law only recognizes the present status of the litigants, and not what they may have been yesterday or will be tomorrow. The man that you insulted may have once been a pauper but today he is someone of great stature in the community. The penalty that has been levied on you represents his current status, and the concomitant insult to it.”

In the future, when G-d calls to account the nations of the world who have oppressed the Jewish People, he will not view their behavior based on the lowly level of the Jewish People in exile. Rather, He will base his adjudication on the status of the Jewish People in the past, the holy children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and on the future, regal people exalted by G-d.

*The Dubner Maggid*

## LOVE OF THE LAND

*Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael*



### BEIT SHEAN

*“If the Garden of Eden is in Eretz Yisrael then its gate is at Beit Shean.”*

This is the Talmudic tribute to the special sweetness of the fruits of this area which lies about 120 meters below sea level.

It was to the walls of Beit Shean that the Philistines fastened the corpses of King Saul and his sons after vanquishing the Israelite army. Saul once saved the honor of the men of Yavesh Gilead, when the Ammonites had surrounded the city and demanded the right to blind the right eye of every one of its citizens as the price of peace. When the men of Yavesh Gilead heard of this, they marched all night in order to remove the bodies and bury them.

Modern Beit Shean was founded soon after the establishment of the State of Israel near a small Arab town called Bissan, a corruption of the city's Biblical name, and rapidly expanded to become a major development town which absorbed many *olim* from North Africa.

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