

THE SECRET OF EXILE AND REDEMPTION – IT'S ALL IN A NAME

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

Whenever Chaim got an aliya and was called up by his full name, Chaim Baruch Meshulam Aryeh Zev, people would come over and ask him who he was named after. He began to find this quite annoying, so he would very politely answer them, "I was named after my older brother." When they would begin to hem and haw and look suitably uncomfortable, he would add with a smile, "And before my younger brother."

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Every parsha in the Torah is unique and has its theme and central point around which the entire parsha revolves, a point that permeates all the verses and stories in the parsha, a point that sets it apart from all the rest of the parshiyos of the Torah. What is special about parshas Shemos? What sets it apart from the rest of the parshiyos that tell about the Jewish people in Egypt?

If we examine the end of the book of Bereishis and the beginning of Shemos, we find that the Jewish people's stay in Egypt is spread out over five parshiyos, starting with Vayigash towards the end of the book of Bereishis and ending with Bo, when the Jewish people leave Egypt with hand held high.

Five parshiyos tell about the first exile and redemption of our people. If we think about it a minute and look at the verses we will see that the uniqueness of parshas Shemos (among the five parshiyos) is that it is the only parsha in which the Torah tells of the (start) of bitter exile and terrible servitude, because although the Jewish people descended to Egypt in Vayigash, our Sages teach us that as long as one of the children of Yaakov was still alive, there was no enslavement. In parshas Va'eira, we already see signs of the Geula with seven Makkos inflicted on the Egyptians for what they did to the Jewish people. The only parsha that describes the enslavement is Shemos! By the end of parshas Shemos, Moshe even complains to Hashem about what He is doing, "Why have you done evil to this people?"

Chassidus always teaches us to look at the name of something because a name reflects its essence. This holds true as well for the names of the parshiyos. In order to know the inner point hidden in every parsha, we need to know, study and examine its name because the name teaches about its contents. This is all the more true when speaking of parshas Shemos=Names!

But we run into a difficulty. The meaning of the word "shemos" here, seems to contradict the general content of the parsha which is about the start of the Egyptian exile. The "names" we are talking about in this verse are the "names of the Jewish people who are coming to Egypt," the names of the children of Yaakov, the tribes. We said before that as long as any of them were alive, there was no servitude!

The mention of the "names of the Jewish people" at the beginning of the parsha emphasizes a point which contradicts the content of the parsha and underscores how there is no exile and no enslavement. Furthermore, Rashi at the beginning of his commentary to Shemos explains that the names of the children of Yaakov at the beginning of the book (even though they were already mentioned and counted in the middle of Vayigash) is "to demonstrate the dearness of the Jewish people" to Hashem, a love that ought to set aside and cancel the bitter exile. If that wasn't enough, the Medrash (at the beginning of Shemos Rabba) adds and stresses "they are mentioned here because of

the redemption of the Jewish people!”

MORE THAN JUST A NAME

So what's going on here? The parsha is about exile while the name of the parsha is about redemption! Only the Rebbe can show how such a question is transformed into the actual answer and how the contradiction is actually the intent. In an amazing sicha, the Rebbe explains how in exile, the ability of self-sacrifice within every Jew is revealed, i.e. the essence of the soul, the yechida.

Why is such a lofty level revealed specifically during a time of concealment? The answer is that there is actually a direct cause and effect. Specifically because all the usual soul powers are in a state of concealment, therefore, we must and can reveal the power of self-sacrifice that derives from the essence of the soul. As long as the soul feels and experiences G-dly intellect and emotion it does not feel the essential connection of the yechida. Specifically in times of trouble, in concealment, when the G-dly bond of the soul to its Creator is not felt, does the essential inner spark of the soul shines more powerfully and the ability to sacrifice oneself to overcome all obstacles in the way of fulfilling Torah and mitzvos, is revealed.

This is the inner meaning of the exile in Egypt and parshas Shemos and this is the true meaning of every exile, even this last one. Externally and superficially, it's a time of concealment, (Tehillim 74:9) “We have not seen our signs; there is no longer a prophet, and no one with us knows how long.” But on the inner level, this is the time when the essence is revealed. This is the time of supernatural hiskashrus with the Creator, a bond that will withstand all obstacles, hindrances and deterrents.

This paradox of the enslavement in Egypt (or all of exile in general) where, on the one hand, it's a time of concealment and, on the other hand, it's a time of revelation, is captured exquisitely when it comes to the significance of names. A name carries within it precisely the same paradox.

On the one hand, a name is merely something external. A person on his own doesn't need a name. Technically speaking, if he is the only person on earth, he wouldn't have a name! The purpose of a name is solely so that other people can call him by his name. On the other hand, a name is associated with the very essence of life for each individual. When a person faints, we try to arouse him by calling his name because calling a person's name arouses his entire being. Why? Because a person's name is associated with the essence and therefore, it draws forth the essence and reveals it.

A name is something external to man and at the same time, and because of this, it reveals the most inner part of him, his very life-force! The same is so for exile and redemption. Exile is the greatest concealment of the G-dly light. Also, and because of this, it reveals the greatest G-dly light which is why the Torah calls the parsha of enslavement and exile by the name “Shemos,” because a name truly expresses what exile really is, what the truth is about exile which hides beneath the surface. It is a paradoxical time which outwardly appears to be concealment while inwardly is a time of the highest revelation, just like a person's name which has nothing to do with a person's essence and arouses and reveals his essential life-force.

This is the special power of the teachings of Chassidus, the power to connect Nigleh and Nistar, the power to unite Gemara and Kabbala, the power to dig into the concealment and extract the revelation, the power to deal with the darkness in order to see the light!

By increasing in learning Chassidus, its instructions and ways, we can find the special power within us to reveal the redemption from within and through the exile!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a story that occurred in the days of the Baal Shem Tov (which appears in Toldos Yaakov Yosef written by a student of the Baal Shem Tov), which highlights the power of a name.

For various reasons, a certain Jewish child was raised by a poritz, a rich gentile. Naturally, he knew nothing about Judaism. When the boy was older, the poritz decided to formally baptize him. In honor of the occasion, the poritz prepared a grand party, being sure that the child wouldn't oppose the plan.

When the poritz informed the boy of his intentions, the boy innocently asked what it signified. The poritz said, "Nothing. Until now you were called Feivish and from now on you'll be called Ivan."

The boy asked, "Why am I called Feivish?"

Having no choice, the poritz told him that he was born a Jew. Hearing this, the boy refused to convert.

"I am called Feivish and I will remain Feivish!"

The poritz punished him severely, so terribly that the boy eventually died.

A Jewish woman said, "Master of the universe, we did not make a mistake in choosing You and You did not make a mistake in choosing us. Even Feivish, who knew nothing, gave up his life al kiddush Hashem!"

Good Shabbos!