

EXODUS

by Rabbi Label Lam

And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt; Yaakov, each man and his household came... (Shemos 1:1)

Why does the Torah tell us "these are the names"? It should rather tell us these are the Children of Israel. The emphasis seems to be on the names. The entire book, "Shemos", is named "Names"! As the old Shakespearean quote goes, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Well, a name is rather enormous.

Over the years while my wife labored in child birth I labored, not quite as hard, on the task the naming. When our oldest son was born 27 plus years ago I was waiting for a lightning bolt of prophecy to land on my head with a name from heaven. I had read that one of the last vestiges of prophecy is when parents are naming children. Without the actual lightning, by the end of the process, I was certain that a prophecy played a role in our boy's name.

Who could even think names!? Within the first few days of new parenthood we were busy with the caterer and the Mohel and making sure they and the baby would all be ready on the same day. Days before the Bris my wife was busy bathing the little nameless Tzadikal. She asked if I would dial the phone and call my mother-in-law. Now my mother-in-law had survived the Holocaust and she had lost some of her hearing. When she answered the phone I had a perfect opportunity to solve a problem that had had been bothering me since the first days of marriage. I had a hard time calling my in-laws mom or dad. (Eventually I was able to do it) So when my mother-in-law answered the phone I asked, "What do you want to be called, "Bubby or Grandma?" She cried and started repeating with big emotion, "Call him Chaim after my father!"

I gave the phone to my wife and she explained to me that her mother thought I said, "What do you want him to be called?" It seems we were stuck with the name Chaim. I fought it though. My wife's name is Chaya. Can a Chaya have a Chaim? We called a Rav and he assured us that they are two different names.

However we were also told that perhaps since this Chaim had perished in the Holocaust it might be worthy to add a name for better Mazel. So we began contemplating a second name. My wife liked Moshe. I had lost a little brother Moshe. He needed a second name. Reb Moshe Feinstein had passed away a year or so earlier. My wife has an illustrious family tree that reaches to Moshe Isserles the Rama. The Chaim needs a Moshe. The Moshe needs a Chaim and Moshe Chaim Luzzato, the

Mesilas Yescharim is my favorite, can we say, author!?

My wife then remembered a rare personal discussion we had with a very great Rabbi who shared with us, for some reason, a deep personal error he and his wife had committed. They named one of their sons, let's say, Shlomo Nechemia, after the Rebbetzin's departed father Nechemia. When the mother-in-law, a great woman herself, realized that her husband's name was in 2nd place she did not talk to them for months. Whenever they called him, they practically swallowed the first name and then they exaggerated the second name. We can't name him Moshe Chaim. It must be Chaim Moshe.

Then I remembered that on the refrigerator where pictures and invitations come and go there remained for months an essay by a Chassidishe boy, in a fourth grade English class where I taught. I ran over to look again. His name was Chaim Moshe. This kid was so unusually wise and I was so impressed by him I did something no teacher should do. I repeated to the class dozens of times emphatically, "I wish my own son should be like this Chaim Moshe". I had no son yet. It was crazy, but I said it. When we made the Bris and I came to teach that day the boys wanted to know the baby's name. I told'm, "Chaim Moshe". This boy came over to me and said, "You said you wanted your son to be like Chaim Moshe!"

There's a lot in his name and everyone's name. Those names are not just arbitrary syllables but rather raw seeds of holy potentiality being planted into the dark soil of Egypt, made to experience exile only in order to demonstrate the incredible power of **exodus**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).