

WHAT'S IN A NAME

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we begin the Sefer [Book] of Shemos--Names. "V'aileh Shemos Bnei Yisroel [And these were the names of the Children of Israel] that went down to Mitzrayim [Egypt]. [1:1]"

The Ramban explains the focus of the first two Books of the Torah and the flow from Breishis into Shemos. Breishis is the Sefer HaYetzirah--the Book of Creation. It contains the creation of the world and its inhabitants and the life-happenings of the Avos [the Patriarchs]. These occurrences were also a creation of sorts--a 'planting' process out from which sprouted all that would happen to their descendants.

With Shemos, the Torah begins to reveal that which resulted from the actions of the Avos. It is called the Book of Exile and Redemption. It begins with the very start of exile--those who descended to Mitzrayim, and concludes with the redemption--the Shchinah [Hashem's holy presence] filling the Mishkan [Sanctuary] and connecting to Bnei Yisroel.

As such, Sefer Breishis was the planting and Sefer Shemos, the sprouting. The Avos planted their abilities and strengths in their descendants and in Shemos this blossomed into redemption. The Shchinah connected to the descendants as it had to the Avos.

The word "ohr--light" was written five times by the Torah's depiction of the creation. The Medrash teaches that these five references correspond to the five Books of the Torah. Hashem's proclamation of "Let there be light" corresponds to Sefer Breishis. The resulting "And there was light" corresponds to Sefer Shemos.

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that the first was the Yetzirah [creation] of light--the creation of the light with which the Avos filled the world and planted within their descendants. The second was the blossoming of that light in their descendants after them.

We understand why the first Sefer is called Breishis--In the Beginning. It aptly describes the focus of the Sefer. Although our parsha is filled with Shemos [names]--the names of the Tribes, Moshe being named and the name of Hashem--the title Shemos doesn't seem to capture the essence of the Sefer.

What is the connection between Shemos [Names] and Exile/Redemption?

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains in the following way. The Medrash teaches that when Hashem created Adom Harishon [Adam, the first man] all of the animals were brought before him and he gave them

names.

In Lashon Hakodesh [the holy language, Hebrew] a name is not simply an agreed upon label that facilitates communication. Rather, it describes the essence and purpose of what something is. Adam, by naming the animals, exhibited an intuition and perception of the role that every animal was meant to play in the revelation of Hashem's glory in this world.

A person's name describes his latent potential. His purpose in life is to bring those abilities to a state of realization. That his actions should be in sync with who he is.

The travails and hardships of the exile forced Bnei Yisroel to dig down deeply into themselves and find strengths that they didn't even know existed. Exile is compared to planting. The point when the seed seems to have completely decomposed is the point when the real growth can begin.

That is the deeper understanding of the tremendous merit that Bnei Yisroel didn't change their names in Mitzrayim. They didn't lose that connection to who they really were and to that which the Avos had planted in them.

The Sefer is called Shemos--Names. "V'aileh Shemos Bnei Yisroel [And these were the names of the Children of Israel] that went down to Mitzrayim [Egypt]. [1:1]"

A name is actually synonymous to exile and redemption. It represents the latent abilities one brings into the exile and it's the fruition of those abilities that will define redemption.

The Ohr Gedalyahu goes on to explain that there is also a state of personal exile. When we are not using our abilities, our talents and that spark of G-dliness that is inside us, we are in exile.

At the end of the Amidah prayer, each individual alludes to his own name and then recites the verse "Hashem tzuree v'go'a'lee--Hashem is my 'rock' and my redeemer." A plea for heavenly assistance in utilizing our abilities to bring honor to Hashem's name and to reach a state of personal redemption.

Good Shabbos,
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