

THE NAME MOSHE DEFINED THE ESSENCE OF OUR LEADER'S PERSONALITY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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The Name Moshe Defined The Essence of Our Leader's Personality

The Yalkut Shimoni comments that Moshe had ten names and lists all ten of these names. One of the names was "chaver" because he joined (chiber) Israel to their Father in Heaven. Another name was Avigdor because he was the founder (Avi) of fences (g'darim), as a result of being the first person to institute precautionary enactments to the Torah. Tuvia was another name of Moshe.

The Medrash comments regarding the opening words of the book of Vayikra ("And He called to Moshe" [Vayikra 1:1]): "By your life, the Almighty said, of all your names, I will only call you by the name given to you by Basya the daughter of Pharaoh." When Pharaoh's daughter found the Jewish baby floating down the Nile, she drew him out of the river and gave him the name Moshe, "for I have drawn him out of the water" (ki min haMayim m'sheeseehu) [Shemos 2:10]. This is the exclusive name that Hashem uses in his communication with the leader of the Jewish people. Nowhere in the Torah do we find explicit reference to any of Moshe's other nine names.

I saw an attempt to explain the reason for this in the Birkas Mordechai by Rav Baruch Mordechai Mizrachi. I am not sure if this is exactly what the Birkas Mordechai is saying, but even if not, perhaps we can elaborate upon this Medrash as follows:

The word "shem" defines what a person is supposed to be and what a person is. According to Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, the word "shem" is related to the word "sham" [there]. "Sham" defines where an item is and "shem" defines where a person is. Moshe Rabbeinu, the master of all prophets, the giver of the Torah, had many attributes. There were many aspects to his personality, his career, and his talents. But perhaps the underlying facet that really defined Moshe, was his modesty (anivus). "The man Moshe was very modest, more so than any person on the face of the earth." [Bamidbar 12:3]

It is only because of Moshe's humility that the Almighty could trust him to transmit the Torah and to be the master of all prophets. All the other attributes and achievements of Moshe Rabbeinu's career stem from his unique modesty. The unchallengeable role he played in the life of our nation represents virtually "absolute power." The only reason why Hashem felt "comfortable" giving Moshe such power, was because of Moshe's extraordinary humility and modesty.

What incident in Moshe Rabbeinu's life gave birth to this quality of humility? The answer to that question, I believe, is "from the water I have drawn him forth." It has a profound effect on a person's ego if he goes through life with the understanding that "but for the grace of G-d and the daughter of Pharaoh, I would not be here."

If a person lives his whole life thinking "I am here only as a chesed" [by virtue of a Divine favor], it changes his entire outlook on life. Nothing is taken for granted anymore. Everything in life is viewed as a gift because "my whole being here, indeed, was a gift and a chesed."

Truth be told, the fact that we are all here is a chesed. We are here as a chesed because of all our parents did for us and we are here as a chesed because of all the Ribono Shel Olam did for us. However, the individual who realizes this is rare and the individual who constantly thinks of it is rarer still. We don't think of the fact that we are here as a chesed. We think of ourselves having a right to be here.

This is especially true in America which is such a rights oriented and rights dominated culture. The foundation of this country is a Bill of Rights. It seems as if every other major issue in this country becomes a right: A right to live, a right to die, a right to abort, a right not to abort, a right over one's body. Everything is a right! Everything is "coming to me." This is not the way it really should be, but this is our indoctrination.

Moshe Rabbeinu did not live his life like that. He was the most modest of all people because his name -- his shem - had this profound effect upon him. "I will call you by none other than the name given to you by Basya, daughter of Pharaoh because that is the defining name of your entire personality.

You lived your life recognizing that you were 'drawn from out of the water' and that if not for her chesed and for My chesed you would have wound up like the thousands of other Jewish children."

Metaphorically, The Waters Were Also Crying

The Torah commands us: "You shall salt your every meal-offering with salt; you may not discontinue the salt of your G-d's covenant from upon your meal-offering -- on all your offerings shall you offer salt." [Vayikra 2:13] This requirement is a Gezeiras haKasuv [Divine decree], with no explicit reason given. One commentary goes so far as to explain that the prohibition against offering leavening or honey with offerings [Vayikra 2:11] is because salt is not able to penetrate these substances.

Our Sages state [See Rashi Vayikra 2:13]: "A covenant was enacted with salt from the six days of creation that the lower waters were promised that they would be offered on the altar." During the "Division of the Waters" that took place on the second day of creation, the "lower waters" were assigned the role of being the oceans, the lakes, and the rivers. These waters complained to G-d that the "upper waters" were left in proximity to the Divine Throne in Heaven and they (the "lower waters") were being spiritually discriminated against. The promise mentioned in the above stated Medrash refers to the answer to this complaint. The "lower waters" were promised that they too would have a spiritual role. The salt from the waters would be offered with the sacrifices and the water itself would be poured on the altar as libations during Succos.

The Imrei Shammai cites an interesting interpretation of the following pasuk in Tehillim, in the name of Rav Moshe Teitelbaum: "Upon the rivers of Bavel, there we sat, we also cried (gam bachinu), when we remembered Zion" [Tehillim 137:1]. What is the word "gam" (also) coming to teach us? Rav Teitelbaum suggests that "gam bachinu" (we also cried) implies that we were not the only ones who cried -- someone else also cried.

Who else cried? The rivers of Bavel themselves cried. Why did they cry? They cried because now they no longer had the consolation that kept them going all those years after the original separation from the "upper waters." Now, the Temple was destroyed and the sacrifices were nullified. No longer would there be water libations on the altar. No more would salt be brought with every offering. Therefore, the waters -- the rivers of Bavel as well as all the waters of the entire "lower world" -- began to cry.

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