

THE NAMING SEQUENCE OF MOSHE'S SONS SEEMS OUT OF ORDER

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Yisro

The Naming Sequence of Moshe's Sons Seems Out of Order

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #624, Resting Your Animal on Shabbos. Good Shabbos!

Moshe Rabbeinu had two sons, each of whose names is mentioned in our parsha [Shemos 18:3-4]. The first son's name was Gershom, for Moshe said "I was a stranger (Ger) in a foreign land." The second son's name was Eliezer, for Moshe said "The G-d of my father helped me (b'Ezree) and saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.

Chronologically, the salvation from the sword of Pharaoh preceded the time Moshe dwelt in a foreign land (Midyan). We would thus expect the elder son to be named Eliezer and the younger son to be named Gershom. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu reverse the order?

The Sforno is bothered by this question. The Sforno's answer is that the Pharaoh, who was out to kill Moshe, was still alive when his elder son was born and Moshe therefore did not feel totally removed from his clutches. By the time the second son was born, this Pharaoh had already died and at that point, Moshe named his son Eliezer to commemorate G-d's salvation from the hand of Pharaoh.

The Chizkuni gives an alternate explanation. The Chizkuni claims that the naming sequence was a manifestation of one of Moshe Rabbeinu's primary midos [character traits]. At the point when Moshe had his first child, Jews were still suffering. Immediately following the birth of Moshe's first son, the Torah describes the increased suffering that the Jews in Egypt were experiencing at just that time. [Shemos 2:22-23] At that very moment, Klal Yisrael was in the depths of the torture of the Egyptian experience.

At such a time, Moshe felt that it would be totally inappropriate to gloat, so to speak, over his personal salvation and name a son based on the fact that G-d saved him from Pharaoh's sword. As long as other Jews were suffering, Moshe felt he could not brag about the fact that he emerged from his personal situation of danger. Rather, the name given to this first son stressed the fact that Moshe too was still in a situation of danger -- "I am a (fugitive) stranger in a foreign land".

However, when the second son was born, the Chizkuni writes, Moshe Rabbeinu was already on the way to Egypt. He was on the way to redeem the people. G-d had heard their cries and He was now already committed to taking them out. At this point, when Klal Yisrael was able to breathe a sigh of relief, Moshe felt comfortable mentioning his own personal salvation in the name he gave to his child.

Perhaps the most prominent attribute of Moshe as a leader was his great sense of empathy for the Jewish people: "And Moshe grew up and he went out to see his brethren and he saw their suffering." [Shemos 2:11] He felt their pain as much as he felt his own pain. Their pain was his pain. He was literally willing to give up his life to spare them suffering.

A person with such a powerful degree of empathy could never celebrate a personal escape from the sword of Pharaoh, so long as his brethren were still in the clutches of this same evil monarch. Only when there was light to be seen at the end of the tunnel, was he prepared to announce "The G-d of my father helped me and saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

Yisro had Great Ideas, but a Secular Perspective

Yisro saw that the people were standing in line to consult with Moshe from morning until evening and he gave his famous advice. Yisro suggested the idea of setting up an appellate court system. "They should judge the people and the great matters (davar hagadol) they shall bring to you and the small matters (davar hakatan) they will judge themselves." [Shemos 18:22]

Moshe liked the idea and adopted it. However, in narrating the implementation of Yisro's plan, the Torah contains one slight amendment: *"The difficult matters (davar hakashe) are brought to Moshe and the small matters they judge themselves"* [Shemos 18:26]. The difference is slight but highly significant.

Yisro envisioned a different type of case arriving at Moshe's tent than what actually occurred in the system Moshe implemented. In Yisro's eyes, a "great matter" (davar hagadol) would have been a case involving Microsoft. A "small matter" was when Reuven's ox gored Shimon's and did \$50 worth of damage. His perspective was that if significant money was involved, Moshe had to take care of it himself. However, if -- based on the amount of money involved -- the Din Torah belonged in small claims court, then Moshe should not be bothered.

This approach is not the correct halachik approach. A \$50 case or a million dollar case must all be equal in the judge's eyes. The amount of money is not what makes a "great matter" or a "small

matter." Righteousness (tzedek) is the issue. Therefore, Moshe insisted that he would not take the big cases, but the hard cases. The matters that are "kasha" [difficult] shall be brought before him. Dollar signs are not the issue. Achieving just and correct conclusions is the mission of the Jewish judicial system.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Yisro are provided below:

Tape # 042 - Kiddush: To Sit or Not to Sit
Tape # 085 - Christianity in Halacha
Tape # 133 - Honoring In Laws
Tape # 180 - The Mitzvah of Kiddush for Men and Women
Tape # 226 - The Fearless Judge: A Difficult Task
Tape # 270 - Paternal Wishes vs. Staying in Israel
Tape # 316 - The Reading of the "Aseres Hadibros"
Tape # 360 - Dolls and Statues: Problem of Avodah Zarah?
Tape # 404 - Making a Brocho on a Makom Neis
Tape # 448 - Lo Sachmod
Tape # 492 - Eating Before Kiddush
Tape # 536 - Newspapers on Shabbos
Tape # 580 - Women and Havdalah
Tape # 624 - Resting Your Animal on Shabbos
Tape # 668 - Kiddush B'Makom Seudah
Tape # 712 - The Kiddush Club
Tape # 756 - The Kosel Video Camera
Tape # 800 - Avoda Zara and the Jewish Jeweler
Tape # 844 - Yisro and Birchas Hagomel
Tape # 888 - Yisro -- What Should It Be - Hello or Shalom?

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#) Seattle, WA;
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#), Baltimore, MD

RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.