

What's in a Name?

A name reflects the essence of an object or person. Why is the second *sefer* of the Torah called 'Sh'mot'; in what way does this title encapsulate the story of slavery and redemption? Further, the names of the *Shevatim* are already mentioned at the end of *Sefer Bereisheet* in the description of their descent to *Mitzrayim*. What information does this first *passuk* add to the scope of the next stage of *Am Yisrael's* journey?

The classic approach as mentioned in the *Ramban (Sh'mot 1;1)*, is to connect the two *sefarim* together and continue the thread of events. What happened in *Sefer Bereisheet* informs what will occur in *Sefer Sh'mot*. We find that the *Midrash* too addresses this question and teaches that the Jewish people were redeemed because they did not change their names, style of dress and

language. Thus, the very name of the *sefer* underscores one of the merits of their redemption.

The tribal names themselves gave the people hope of redemption

Rabbi Brazil in *Bishvili Nivra Haolam* quotes the *Igra D'kalla* who details the two decrees Paroh gave to the Hebrew midwives. First, they had to change their names and then they were instructed to kill the baby boys born to the Jewish women. Paroh understood the power of a name and the identity it creates. His hope was that once the midwives underwent this change in character, it would be easier for them to relate to the children as mere numbers and to kill the babies. (This clearly recalls how the Germans, *yemach shemam*, numbered the Jewish prisoners to strip them of any sense of self and identity.) Rav Brazil further notes that our *passuk* first lists the names of the *shevatim* and only then states that 70 family members went down to *Mitzrayim*. One's name is a *segulah* for a person to connect to his inner essence and not be influenced by outside forces. This is the secret of living as a redeemed person in a hostile environment.

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Seforno suggests that the emphasis on *Sh'mot* highlights how the *shevatim* lived up to their given *kochot* inherent in their names. Rav Gifter adds that the *shevatim* were able to adapt to any situation in which they found themselves. These same individuals from *Eretz Canaan* were able to maintain their standard of piety and strength of spirit in the land of Egypt. Rav Elyashiv takes this one step further. The *Midrash* notes that each of the *shevatim*'s names reflected an aspect of redemption. For example, Reuven – Hashem **saw** their oppression, Shimon – Hashem **heard** their cries. The tribal names themselves gave the people hope of redemption, enabling them to remain steadfast in their righteousness and integrity throughout the difficult exile. The names infused conviction and promise, fostering the redemption.

Rav Eisenberger in *Mesilot Bilvavam* explains that when a child is given a name, it is with hope that he or she remains unwavering to the essence of what the name reflects. After 120 years, one of the last acts of the *Chevrah Kadisha* is to mention the name of the deceased. This is to invoke a merit for the deceased that he maintained the principles reflected in his name. This is akin to what *chazal* teach us about Yosef who maintained his spirituality wherever he was, even in the depravity of Egypt.

Herein is the theme of *Sefer Sh'mot*; faithfulness and loyalty to the essence in one's name activates the power of personal and national redemption. ■