



Notable Names

“*Ve’eyleh shemot benei Yisrael haba’im Mitzrayimah et Yaakov ish u’beito ba’u. Reuven, Shimon, Levi ...*” And these are the names of the children of Yisrael who came to Egypt with Jacob, each man and his household came: Reuven, Shimon, Levi...” (*Shemot 1:1-2*). Why is there a need now to repeat the names of Yaakov’s children who came down to Egypt? Hasn’t this list already been recorded in *Parashat Vayigash*? Further, we must understand the appellation “*Shemot* -Names,” as this *sefer* is known.

Rashi’s commentary at the beginning of each of the *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* embodies the concept of Hashem’s intense love for His people. Here he explains that since Hashem loves *Klal Yisrael* so much, He recounts the names of the *shevatim* again. Rashi notes that the Jewish people are compared to the beloved stars that Hashem puts out and brings in calling each by name. Rabbi Aryeh Leib Baskt *zt”l* offers a deeper nuance as to why we are compared to stars. The stars are unique in that they were not part of the original creation, they were created afterward to appease the moon whose light became diminished. Likewise, a Jew’s whole purpose is to be concerned with the needs of another and alleviate his brother’s pain. In his introduction to *Nefesh HaChayim*, Rav Itzle Volozhiner notes that his father would

continually remind his students, “*lo le’atzmo nivra rak le’ho’il le’acharini*,” a Jew was not created for selfish purposes, rather he was created to benefit others. The Midrash notes that in the merit of helping each other and showing concern for one another, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt.

The Tosher Rebbe *zt”l* in *Avodat Avodah* focuses on the power inherent in one’s name; it connects him with his higher spiritual source and awakens his individual spiritual powers. This is one reason to call a person by his full name at least once a day so he can tap into the tremendous potency in his name. Further, *Sefer Shemot* begins with the letter ‘*vav*,’ connecting it to *Sefer Bereisheet*. This teaches us that the very names that Yaakov’s children were called in Eretz Yisrael were the same ones they used in Mitzrayim. One of the merits the Jews exhibited in the Egyptian exile was keeping their Jewish identities and not changing their names. Hence, at the beginning of this new book, the Torah shows us the power that a Jew possesses to survive the *galut* and emerge spiritually intact.

The names of each *Shevet*, the *Kli Yakar* explains, contain hints of redemption both from Mitzrayim as well as for the future. Reuven reflects that “Hashem has seen the suffering,” Shimon embodies the idea that “Hashem has heard the affliction,” and so on. Keeping their Jewish names ensured that they would continuously remember that Hashem is with us in the pain and will eventually bring redemption, engendering

hope for salvation. How appropriate then that *Names* are indeed the designation of this new stage in our story, they are our link to the past, and our hope for a better future. ■

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