



## What's in a Name?

### Your Name is Your Soul Root

I've always been Chana – that is its Danish version which is Hanne. Although I liked my name, it is known that changing your name can change your destiny as it states:

Four things cancel a person's negative decree, namely, charity, crying out in prayer, change of name and change of conduct...Change of name, as it is written, "Your wife Sarai, you shall not call her name Sarai, for Sarah is her name" (*Bereishit* 17:15). It continues, "And I will bless her, and I will give you a son from her" (*ibid.* 16); (*Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana* 16b).

I thought to add a second name, after suffering secondary infertility for many years. So, I sent my husband to Dayan Fisher z"l, who was known for helping people choose the right name, due to his deep kabbalistic knowledge of the essence of names. He told me to add another name that ended with the Hebrew letter ה/*heh*, which is known in the Torah to be the letter of fertility (*Sefer Likutei Torah, Parashat Vayetze*). He gave me two options: Bracha – 'Blessing' or Penina – 'Pearl.' Needless to say, I easily made my choice- to add more blessings to my life. Since becoming Chana Bracha and answering only to this name, my life has become filled with blessings: First of all, I was blessed with a second son. Hashem also blessed me to establish Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin and to publish books. Guiding new converts in choosing their Jewish name is a great privilege which I enjoy, but also an immense responsibility, as each letter in their name can impact their destiny. It is interesting to note, that people sharing the same name have certain personality similarities. The *Magid Mesharim* (the book that documents the information revealed to Rav Yosef Karo by an angel) explains that whoever is called Avraham tends towards doing kindness, and whoever is called Yosef is either a master of self-control, or supports others in the way that Yosef supported his father and brothers. I experienced this in the names of my father and his brothers. My father's name was Shlomo הכ"מ. He always was the person who was wiser and who knew better, while his brother Abraham was always mild and kindhearted. His other brother, Moshe, was always humble.

### Your Name Calls Out the Essence of Your Soul

Studying the layered meaning of our Hebrew names is fascinating. Our name is the vessel that holds the essence of our soul. The word שֵׁם/*shem* – 'name,' is actually the center of the word נֶשְׁמָה/*neshamah* – 'soul.' Our mission in this world is determined by our name (*Ba'al Hashem tov, Bereishit* 135). According to Ramban, every person has his name hinted in the Torah. Our deeds, work, nature and character is based upon the place in the Torah where our name is alluded.

The name that one is called in Hebrew is a conduit for the life-force that is condensed into its letters... (*Tanya, Sha'ar Ha'Yichud Ve'ha'Emunah, Chapter 1, p. 77a*).

This is because, the numerical value of the word שֵׁם/*shem* – 'name' is identical with צְנוּר/*tzinor* – 'channel' (340). Therefore, it is important to call a person by their full Hebrew name rather than by a shortened nickname, or their secular name. It is something to keep in mind when naming children. If the name we choose is too long, it will be hard for people to call the full name. Although the names of both my sons have altogether five syllables, now, decades later, I recommend to give your children a name no longer than four syllables, since most people don't call my sons their full two names, because they are a bit too long. Certainly if someone has more than two names, it will be nearly impossible to be consistently called by his or her full name. I've heard that at the very least, we must ensure to be called by our full Hebrew name once a day. So if our spouse and or child(ren) have multiple names, we can ignite their soul by calling them their

full name at least once every day. My daughter-in-law consulted with Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu before naming their first daughter. She reported that the Rav said to use just one name. I understand now that this was to ensure that she would always be called by her full name. The names that our parents give us are inspired by *Ruach Hakodesh* (prophetic insight) so that the name given matches our soul root. My first granddaughter is called Shira (song), and she truly loves to sing and praise Hashem in prayer! Based on his name as revealed in *gematria* and acrostics, the Vilna Gaon knew where the Torah hints at the name of every Jew, and his destined role in the redemption of Israel. "Every Israelite has a root above in his name, in accordance with his soul-root and family merit. For it is known that the name a child is given when born is not by accident. Rather, it is placed in the parents' mind from heaven, in accordance with the soul-root of the child (*Kol HaTor*, Chapter 3, Paragraph 10). I definitely felt as a channel for Hashem's will, when I was guided to choose the names of our sons.

### The Nameless Parasha Called 'Names'

This week's *parasha* is called שמות/*Shemot* – 'names.' It is interesting to note that most of the people described in *Parashat Shemot* are nameless. For example, when it comes to Moshe's family, everyone is anonymous as it states,

**ספר שמות פרק ב פסוק א וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי:**

"A man went from the house of Levi and took a daughter of Levi" (*Shemot* 2:1).

In the following verse, the "daughter of Levi" – Moshe's mother is simply called, האִשָּׁה /*ha'isha* – "the woman." Moshe, himself, is merely called, הַיֵּלֶד/*hayeled* – "the child," his sister, Miriam, is only called, "his sister," and his adoptive Mom, Bitya, is never called anything other than "daughter of Pharaoh" (see *Shemot* 2:2-5). Even the names of the Jewish midwives, Shifra and Puah, are nicknames connected with proliferation, as Rashi states, SHIFRA- This was Yocheved, because she used to put the babe after its birth into good physical condition (משפּרת) by the care she bestowed upon it (*Sotah* 11b). PUAH- This was Miriam, because she cried (פּוֹעָה), talked and cooed to the newborn infant in the manner of women who soothe a crying infant. פּוֹעָה is an expression of crying out, similar to *Like a travailing woman will I cry* (אַפְּעָה) (*Yeshu'ahu*. 42:14); (Rashi, *Shemot* 1:15). Scripture used these nicknames in order to emphasize that they did not doubt the approaching redemption, and for that reason they refused to heed Pharaoh's command. Puah refers to Miriam who spoke in prophesy as it said, "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon..." She prophesied saying: In the future my mother will give birth to a son who will redeem Israel. Shifra is Yocheved because she was transformed to a beautiful (*shofra*) young girl when she was 130 years old. This miracle was a sign that she would give birth to the redeemer of Israel, because a miracle is never performed without a reason (Kli Yakar, *Shemot* 1:15).

### Love of life and Procreation Create True Identity

*Parashat Shemot* opens up with no-names as a result of the Egyptian strategy, to deprive the Jews of identity. The Jewish response was to insist all the more upon identity expressed by their Hebrew names: "The Children of Israel were redeemed from Egypt because they would not change their names..." (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5). Pharaoh wasn't concerned about the birth rate. He wanted to kill only the males. He feared only personalities with individual identity expressed by their names – a people that might rebel against servitude. The Egyptians were willing to absorb numerous women because they believed they would be pliable and easy to control. Although Pharaoh was able to demoralize the men, he had totally underestimated the women, who dedicated their lives to raising numerous Jewish children. It was their commitment to life that brought redemption. By omitting the names of important people in the *parasha* called "Names," the Torah teaches us that there is no contradiction between reproduction and individual significance- for Israel they are interdependent. The Torah definition of individuality is closely linked with love of life and

procreation. It was the women whose passion for new life provided Israel's identity. Despite the intensity of the exile and the despair in seeing children thrown into the Nile, there was not a single person in Israel who was willing to abort an unborn fetus. This was the reason they were delivered out of Egypt (*Zohar* part 2, 3b). It takes love and passion for life to create true identity. The greatness of the unique contribution of the individual is interdependent on his/her commitment to the general passion to fruitfulness and multiplication. The names in *Sefer Shemot* exist only by virtue of that passion (Rabbi Matis Weinberg).