

The boy grew up and she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh and he was a son to her. She called his name Moshe, as she said, “For I drew him from the water.” (2:10)

The well-known *Midrash* at the beginning of *Sefer Shemos* states: “By your life! (Hashem is speaking to Moshe). From amongst all of the names that were called (given) to you, I will only refer to you by the name given to you by Bisyah *bas* Pharaoh. Thus, it is written, *Vatikra shemo Moshe*; ‘And she (Bisyah) called him Moshe;’ *Vayikra el Moshe*, ‘And He (Hashem) called to Moshe.’” This is a wonderful commentary on the character and moral demeanor of Bisyah, Pharaoh’s daughter. Nonetheless, **Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl**, wonders why Hashem accepted a name which was given to Moshe as a result of a specific occurrence. While the name was significant to Bisyah, since it describes how she saved the infant Moshe from the waters of the Nile River, it does not have anything to do with Moshe himself. How did this name define our quintessential leader?

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, observes that this question is not exclusive to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, but to others as well. Hashem instructed Avraham *Avinu* to call his son by the name Yitzchak. Shortly thereafter, Sarah *Imeinu* says, *Tzchok asah li Elokim, kol ha’shomea yitzachak li*, “G-d has made laughter (*tzchok*) for me; whomever hears will laugh for me” (*Bereishis* 21:6). Indicative of the Torah’s juxtaposition of Yitzchak’s name upon Sarah’s laughter is that the two are closely connected. Why? Furthermore, Reuven and Shimon both received their names from their mother, Leah *Imeinu*, as a result of circumstances in her life. What about Sarah’s reaction to an almost comical thought concerning her achieving motherhood at an advanced age served as the basis for Yitzchak’s name? This question applies to Leah’s naming of Reuven and Shimon, as well.

Rav Heyman quotes a passage in the *Talmud Brachos 7b*, which he offers as a springboard for explaining the source, as well as the significance, of names. The *Talmud* establishes the premise that a name affords us a glimpse into that person’s future achievements. Based upon this premise, the *Talmud* expounds on Rus *HaMoaviah*’s name: “Why was she called Rus? She merited to have David *Hamelech* descend from her. David sated *sherivahu*, (which is from the root *riva*, a word closely connected to Rus) Hashem with songs and praises. From where do we know that a name is the cause of future occurrences? It is because it is stated in the *pasuk*, *Lechu chazu mifalos Hashem, asher sam shamos ba’aretz*, “Go and see the words of G-d, who has wrought devastation in the land. Do not pronounce it *shamos* (devastation); rather, pronounce it *sheimos* (names).” Rus’s name was prophetic of the deeds of her descendants.

Concerning this statement of the *Talmud*, the **Maggid Mesharim** says, “This is the secret of a name. ‘Do not pronounce it *shamos*,’ rather, pronounce it *sheimos*, provides us insight into the influence of a name. One who is called Avraham will gravitate towards performing acts of lovingkindness (Avraham *Avinu* was the consummate *baal chesed*); and one who is called Yosef will either be powerfully strong in his opposition to *arayos*, any form of immoral behavior, or he will be exemplary in his prodigious support and sustenance of those who are financially

challenged. (These were two areas *Yosef* exemplified. He warded off the enticements presented to him by Potifar's wife and he sustained his entire family and the citizens of Egypt.) This idea applies to all names. We find individuals who are by their very demeanor evil, even if they have names that are righteous in nature; that name does not protect them by preventing them from acting out their base tendencies. Names will only provide them with a *netiyah*, gravitation, toward good." (If he does not follow this "pull" on his psyche, he will act nefariously).

Rachel *Imeinu* named *Yosef* as a symbol that Hashem added another son to her (*Yosef Hashem li ben acher, Bereishis 30:24*). It had nothing to do with the unique talents and proclivities of *Yosef*. Furthermore, one who names his son *Yosef* does not do so due to the reason detailed by the *Maggid Meisharim*. Nonetheless, one who has a child whom Heaven has designated to possess the qualities which defined *Yosef*, the father of that child will be Divinely inspired to name his son *Yosef*. In other words, the name is not the catalyst for the child's positive actions. This is part of the child's innate nature. Heaven will "see to it" that the child will somehow receive a name that coincides with his nature.

Rav Heyman applies this principle to explain the *Midrash* concerning *Moshe's* ten names. Our leader possessed ten names. Which one was decreed upon him by Heaven? Hashem told *Moshe*, "The name that agrees/coincides most with you is *Moshe*. *Bisyah* had no idea of this phenomenon. It was Hashem Who Divinely orchestrated circumstances, so that *Bisyah* name him *Moshe*. "Unknowingly," she concurred with the name that Hashem had chosen for *Moshe*.

This concept is clearly affirmed by **Rabbeinu Bachya** in his commentary to this *pasuk*. He writes: "*Bisyah bas Pharaoh* merited that the name that was designated for him (*Moshe*) forever was the name which she picked to commemorate the miracle that had occurred when she drew him out of the water. Hashem placed this name in her heart, and Hashem did not call him by any other name."

Likewise, the other names which we find in *Sefer Bereishis* were given for specific reasons. For example, the name *Yitzchak* was given to the Patriarch by his parents in recognition of the laughter that was generated by his birth. The name *Yitzchak* actually came from Hashem, Who had His "reasons." *Rav Heyman* adds that, quite possibly, just as the birth of *Yitzchak* was so miraculous and supernatural, the amazement was almost mirthful and blithesome, so, too, will be the survival of the Jewish People. As one peruses history, one marvels at the absolutely astonishing survival of the Jewish nation throughout the ages. It is almost comical.

This idea may be inserted throughout the births of the various "children" in *Sefer Bereishis*. The parents gave names based upon circumstances, but these names were Divinely inspired by Hashem for reasons unbeknownst to them.