

When the entire assembly saw that Aharon had perished, they wept for Aharon thirty days, the entire House of Yisrael. (20:29)

Chazal teach that following Aharon *HaKohen's* passing, all male children were given the name "Aharon" after the holy man whose life was devoted to promoting peace among Jews and marital harmony among husband and wife. Many a family was acutely aware of the role that Aharon played in sustaining their marriage. Out of respect and appreciation -- and probably as a sort of remembrance of the fragility of relationships and how this man saved theirs -- they named their sons Aharon. **Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita**, relates that he was once approached by a young couple who had undergone marital issues which were resolved through the help of a certain *Rav*. They had been blessed with a son. Their question was, do they name the child after the *Rav* or after the baby's father (the prevalent *Sephardic* custom in their community)? *Rav* Zilberstein cited the above *Chazal* in support of his reasoning that the child be named for the *Rav* that had saved their marriage.

The following story is probably one of many which occurred. This is the only one, which I have found recorded with names, attesting to its veracity. It is moving, especially as I write it today, after meeting with someone who attended *yeshivah* with me some fifty years ago. I was attending a conference on how to reach out to Jews who, as a result of addiction or other issues of abuse, were incarcerated for felonies which they committed. One of the speakers was a man about my age, who sadly did not make it in the *yeshivah* world. Nonetheless, after bottoming out on life, he found help through the intervention of a distinguished *rav*. He still has a ways to go towards achieving religious observance, but he is alive and cognizant of this fact. Listening to him speak, recalling the events of his youth, which led to his dismissal from the *yeshivah*, looking at his features and facial expression, it all came back to me. Hopefully, this reunion after fifty years will reinforce a continued return on his part.

Now for the story. The Egyptian exodus took place at a time when our people were physically and spiritually enslaved in the darkness of misery and evil that personified Egypt. Our people have suffered through the darkness of exile for over two thousand years; yet, our faith has sustained us; our spirit is alive as a result of our hope that one day, very soon, we will be blessed with the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. Some people, however, as a result of their isolation from the Torah community, have never been imbued with that sense of hope. Nonetheless, we may never ignore the spiritual gravitational pull of the *Pintele Yid*, Jewish soul, which rests within each and every one of us. Despite all of the spiritual dross that is heaped upon it, it continues to serve as our GPS for returning to Hashem's embrace. The story of Yocheved Sheinberger (I think that is her real name) is one such story, which sends a chill up the spine while warming our Jewish hearts.

Yocheved was four months old when the accursed Nazis invaded Holland and rounded up the members of its Jewish population. Among the victims who were immediately sent to the death

camps were Yocheved's parents and older brother. They were never heard from again. Yocheved was miraculously saved by her babysitter, who grabbed the infant and took her to a small fishing village in northern Holland. For the next seven years of her life, Yocheved was raised as a Christian, with no knowledge whatsoever of her birth parents or Jewish heritage. Only at the age of seven did she discover the truth. After the war, relatives of her parents came to bring her "home". Understandably, with no previous knowledge of Judaism or her relationship with it, she had no desire to leave her adoptive parents whom she had accepted as her own. "These are my parents; I have no other parents," she said.

Her *neshamah* was working overtime and, when a few years later, her uncle and aunt asked her to spend *Shabbos* with them, she accepted. Over the years this relationship blossomed, until, shortly before her *bas mitzvah*, she declared that she was ready to move to Amsterdam to discover her Jewish roots. This move precipitated her registration in an Orthodox school and, within a short while, Yocheved became observant. She was still very troubled by one pressing question, which kept gnawing at her continually: Why did her parents name her Yocheved? She was troubled by the name since, after questioning her surviving relatives, no one remembered anyone by the name of Yocheved in the family's bloodlines. A Jewish name plays a critical role in a person's life. Thus, at one time or another, everyone wants to know for whom they are named and what kind of person he/she was.

One day, Yocheved was given an assignment for school: Holland's Jewish community on the eve of World War II. She went to the local library to do research in its archive section. Perusing newspapers and other periodicals, she was able to sense from the writings that the Jewish community had surrendered all hope. They sensed their tragic end coming in the near future, and they expressed their feelings in the various letters and articles, which they wrote. Looking through a collection of letters, she suddenly came across a letter penned by her late parents. At first she thought it was a mistake, but when she saw the signatures, Ita and Hans Sheinberger, her heart began to thump wildly. The date on the letter was two months after the outbreak of World War II. With sadness and trepidation, Yocheved began to read the last written words by her parents. Indeed, she felt they were speaking to her from the grave. (I use the word "grave" as a metaphor, since most of the *kedoshim*, martyrs, did not receive a proper burial.)

The following are excerpts from her parents' last communication. "In recent months, we have been privy to sounds of *yiush*, hopelessness, emanating from the Dutch Jewish community. People have lost their zest for life, to the point that some have totally given up on living. Despair and depression have taken hold of our minds, as people have given up all hope for the future. From the moment that we were blessed with the conception of our future child, friends and strangers have approached us with the question, 'How could you? How dare you bring a child into the darkness that envelopes Jewry? Why would you want a child when you will soon die?'"

"To these people, we have no complaints; indeed, we understand how they feel. We, however, rely on the *Midrash* that teaches us concerning the courage of Miriam, who, when her parents, Amram

and Yocheved, divorced, said, ‘Your decree is worse than that of Pharaoh! He only wants to kill the male population, while you are preventing any child – male or female – from entering the world.’ Hearing these accusatory words, Amram and Yocheved remarried, and from this union came forth our quintessential leader and *Rebbe*, Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

“In closing, we have decided that if Hashem blesses us with a son, we will name him Amram after the illustrious leader of the Jews in exile who encouraged them to continue populating. If the child will be a girl, we will rightfully name her Yocheved, the mother of Moshe, who was the leader of the *nashim tzidkanios*, righteous women, of Egypt, who engendered their families with faith in Hashem, despite being enveloped in the darkness of the Egyptian exile”.

Yocheved just sat there for a while absorbing the contents of the letter. She now knew the story behind her name and what it represented for her. The tears flowed freely – only this time, they were tears of hope, not sadness.