

פרשת שמות תשע"ח

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Insights into Torah and Halakha from Rav Ozer Glickman שליט"א

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**She called him Moshe...**

ויגדל הילד ותבאֵהוּ לבת־פַּרְעֹה וְהִיא־לָהּ לְבֵן וְתִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וְתֹאמַר כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם מִשִּׁיתָהוּ:

*And when the child had grown, she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh and he became her son. She called him Moshe, explaining 'I drew him out from the water.'* - *Shmot II:10*

אָמַר לוֹ הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמִשְׁהָ חַיִּיהָ מִכָּל שְׁמוֹת שֶׁנִּקְרָאוּ לָהּ אֵינִי קוֹרֵא אוֹתָהּ אֶלָּא בְּשֵׁם שֶׁקְּרָאתָהּ בְּתִיָּה בַת פַּרְעֹה: וְתִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה, וְיִקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה. - ויקרא רבה א':ג'

*The Holy One Blessed be He said to Moshe: By your life, of all the names by which you were called I only call you by the name that Batya the daughter of Pharaoh called you: "And she called him Moshe". [Therefore] And He called to Moshe.- Vayikra Rabbah I:3*

Who first gave *Moshe Rabbenu* his Hebrew name? Was it Pharaoh's daughter, implying she knew the Hebrew language? Or was it perhaps *Yocheved* who first named him? Pharaoh's daughter might have simply endorsed the choice made earlier by *Moshe's* biological mother, since it fit in with the fact of his rescue from the Nile. The first alternative suits the plain meaning of the text, identifying a single subject for the two verbs in proximity to each other, "וְתִקְרָא" and "וְתֹאמַר". It introduces, however, the difficulty of *Batya's* familiarity with Hebrew and her embrace of a foreign name in the royal Egyptian household. The second alternative obviates that secondary question but assumes either a different subject for the first of the two verbs or an earlier naming unmentioned in the text. As is often the case, the elliptical text of the Torah pits simplicity of language against complexity of interpretation.

*Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra* finds an intermediate path that preserves the simplicity of the language without necessitating that Pharaoh's daughter knew Hebrew and embraced a Hebrew name for an adoptive son of the Egyptian royal household:

*The name Moshe is translated from Egyptian to Hebrew.*

שם משה מתורגם מלשון מצרים בלשון הקדש.

Pharaoh's daughter chose an Egyptian name with the etymology described in the verse which merely translates it all into Biblical Hebrew.

Whether the name was translated from Egyptian or first suggested by *Yocheved*, the text is clear on one thing: it became *Moshe Rabbenu's* name of record because of its usage by Pharaoh's daughter. She may have used an Egyptian version or she may have called him by his Hebrew name. The name *Moshe*, according to each of these interpretations, draws its authority from its usage in some form by Pharaoh's daughter. This is the plain meaning of the text.

The *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* eloquently promotes this idea by placing the two "callings" of *Moshe* by name in apposition, the verse in *Shemot* recounting his naming by Pharaoh's daughter and the opening verse of *Sefer Vayikra* in which God calls to *Moshe Rabbenu*. Although *Moshe Rabbenu* had ten names according to tradition, it is the name chosen by Pharaoh's daughter by which God chooses to call him.

The context is somewhat different in *Midrash Shemot Rabbah*:

From here you can learn about the merit of those who perform acts of kindness. Even though Moses had many names, the only name that was set throughout the Torah was the name that Batya the daughter of Pharaoh called him. Even the Holy One Blessed is He did not call him by any other name.

מִכָּאן אַתָּה לִמַּד שֶׁכָּרֵן שֶׁל גּוֹמְלֵי חֲסִדִּים, אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁהֲרֵבָה שְׁמוֹת הָיָו לוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה, לֹא נִקְבַּע לוֹ שֵׁם בְּכָל הַתּוֹרָה אֲלָא כְּמוֹ שֶׁקָּרְאתוֹ בְּתֵיבָה בֵּת פְּרַעֲוָה, וְאֵף הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לֹא קָרָאָהוּ בְּשֵׁם אַחֵר:

Although the basis of the two *derashot* is the same, i.e., God chooses to call *Moshe* by the name chosen by his adoptive mother, the emphasis is different in each. In *Parashat Shemot*, the focus is on *Moshe's* birth and early biography. The *d'rasha* therefore doesn't focus on a specific Divine act of calling *Moshe* as it does in *Parashat Vayikra*. The *Midrash* notes that God refers to *Moshe* by this particular name throughout the entire Torah. In *Parashat Vayikra*, the focus is on the Divine call of *Moshe* to the *Ohel Moed*. The *d'rasha* therefore cites the verse at the beginning of *Vayikra*.

Since the *d'rasha* in *Shemot Rabbah* is focused on the infant *Moshe* and Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him, it explains the Divine endorsement of her name choice in terms of her own behavior. What lesson are we to derive from the Divine endorsement of the name choice of *Moshe's* adoptive mother? Rewards accrue to those who dispense *chesed*. By virtue of her kindness toward the seemingly abandoned infant, *Batya* the daughter of Pharaoh is immortalized every time the *Chumash* refers to *Moshe*, a name she chose or the Hebrew equivalent of the name she chose.

In *Vayikra Rabbah*, there is no such explanation offered. Given that the focus of the midrash there appears to be *Moshe* rather than *Batya*, what might be the *darshan's* motivation? A number come to mind. One might be to assert the connection to *Batya*. Indeed, *Sh'mot Rabbah*, in a later *parashah*, uses God's preference for the name given him by *Batya* to be an indication of the greater bond of parenthood between the adoptive parent who raises a child and the biological parent who relinquished the baby:

*This may be compared to an orphan who was raised by a guardian, a good and faithful man. He raised her, protected her as needed. When he sought to arrange her marriage, the scribe came to write the ketuba. He asked her, what is your name? She answered, So-and-so. He then said to her and what is your father's name? She was silent. Her guardian asked her, why are you silent? She said, because I don't know any father other than you, for the one who does the parenting is called father and not the one who merely sired. So are Israel orphans, as it is written: we were orphans without a father. Their guardian, good and faithful is the Holy One Blessed be He.*

מִשָּׁל לִיתוּמָה שֶׁהִיְתָה מְתַגְדֶּלֶת אֶצְל אֶפּוֹטְרוֹפּוֹס, וְהָיָה אָדָם טוֹב וְנֹאמָן, גִּדְּלָהּ וּשְׁמָרָהּ פְּרֹאִי, בִּקְשָׁה לְהַשְׁיֵאָהָ, עָלָה הַלְבָּלָר לְכַתֵּב הַכֶּתֻבָּה, אָמַר לָהּ מַה שְׁמֶךָ, אָמְרָה פְּלוֹנִיָּה. אָמַר לָהּ וּמַה שֵׁם אָבִיךָ, הִתְחִילָה שׁוֹתֶקֶת. אָמַר לָהּ אֶפּוֹטְרוֹפּוֹס שְׁלָה לְמַה אֶת שׁוֹתֶקֶת, אָמְרָה לוֹ מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֵינִי יוֹדַעַת לִי אָב אֲלָא אוֹתָךְ, שֶׁהִמְגִּדֶל נִקְרָא אָב וְלֹא הַמּוֹלִיד. כִּךָ הִיתוּמִים אֵלּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (אֵיכָה ה', ג'): יְתוּמִים הֵיּינּוּ וְאֵין אָב. אֶפּוֹטְרוֹפּוֹס שְׁלָהֶם הַטּוֹב הַנֶּאֱמָן, זֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

The *midrash* above comes to explain why Israel refers to God as Father when we were sired by human fathers, *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*. Just as the parental bond is stronger between the child and the parent who raised her, so the bond between God, our Guardian and Protector, is stronger than the bond between Israel and the *Avot*. In a strong sense, God has superseded the *Avot* as Father *par excellence*.

This may well be the idea behind the *d'rasha* in *Vayikra Rabbah*. The *midrash* there lists a number of other names for *Moshe* including some identified as originating with *Yocheved*. The point of the *d'rasha* in *Vayikra Rabbah* may be that God recognizes the parenthood of *Batya* by using the name she chose for *Moshe*.

In my reading of the *parasha*, the name *Moshe* is much more than a shout-out to Pharaoh's daughter. Biblical names often have extraordinary significance. I once heard Professor Meir Sternberg liken them to the epithets that are prominent in other ancient literatures. Think Homer's "swift-footed Achilles." Such epithets are missing in Biblical literature since they are unnecessary. We often learn what we need to know about a particular figure from

his or her name.

The key to understanding this passage is, in my view, triggered by the first question posed by the great *Don Yitzchak Abarbanel* on the *parasha*:

*The first question: what was the mother of Moshe Rabbenu alav ha-shalom thinking when she put her son in the ark made of reeds? Was it only because she wasn't able to hide him any more? How would she profit from this action? All the evil that Pharaoh sought to perpetrate against Israel was based on throwing the male babies into the Nile. She effectively chose to do what had been decreed of her own free will by herself casting him into the Nile! How had she found comfort in putting him into a flimsy ark? This was undoubtedly false comfort, for if the Nile would overturn the ark the child would die there! If a person would pick up the ark, they would likely follow the royal order and cast him into the Nile! She could not have known that Pharaoh's daughter would go there and take him as it actually happened for this was a distant possibility! How could she rely on this?*

השאלה הא': מה ראתה אם מרע"ה לשום את בנה בתיבת גומא ולהשליכו ליאור? האם מפני שלא יכלה עוד הצפינו ומה הועילה בתקנתה זו? כי הנה כל הרע שחשב פרעה לעשות לישראל הוא להשליך את הילדים ליאור. והיה אם כן בחרה ברצונה לעשות בידיה כל מה שנגזר עליה כיון שהיא בעמצה השליכתו ליאור? התנחמה במה ששמתה בתיבת גומא? אין ספק שתנחומים של הבל היו כי אם יהפוך היאור את התיבה ימות הילד בתוך היאור! ואם יקחה איש ישליכהו ליאור כמצות המלך! והיא לא ידעה שבת פרעה תלך שמה ותקחהו כמו שקרה כי זה אפשר רחוק מאד הוה ואיך נסמכה עליו?

*Moshe's* birth is a struggle between Pharaoh and his two mothers, his birth mother *Yocheved* and his adoptive mother *Batya*. The Nile is the arena in which this struggle unfolds. Pharaoh's decree is inescapable. *Yocheved* attempts to hide her baby but to no avail. As he grows bigger and his crying louder, there is no choice but to put him in the Nile. She outsmarts Pharaoh, though, configuring a little vessel to bear him along the water's ebb and flow.

And then the One behind the entire story brings the ark to Pharaoh's daughter and she completes the victory over Pharaoh. A lone Hebrew mother conceives the plan to confound Pharaoh's evil order. The ultimate irony is that its success is guaranteed by a member of Pharaoh's own household.

*Moshe's* name captures this partnership between his two mothers. *Yocheved* placed him in the Nile; *Batya* drew him out. The *Abarbanel* himself notes the absence of *Moshe's* father *Amram*:

*Note that all these acts are attributed by the text to Moshe's mother; nothing is mentioned about his father. This may be because he had already died or otherwise wasn't there or had despaired of the situation, not wanting to try, saying to himself, "let me not see the death of the child..."*

והנה כל המעשים האלה ייחס הכתוב לאם משה ולא זכר בהן דבר מאביו. אולי שכבר היה מת או שלא היה שמה או שנתיאש מהדבר ולא רצה להשתדל בענינו כי אמר אל אראה במות הילד וגומר.

In my reading of the *parasha*, the salvation of *Moshe* himself the savior of *Am Yisrael* is effected by his mothers. It is an act of maternity. To emphasize this, it is his sister and not his older brother who participates in these events. By selecting the name given him by *Batya*, the Torah signals that the essence of *Moshe Rabbenu* is to embody the eternity of Israel's divine destiny even as mortal tyrants and kings seek to overturn it. Pharaoh decreed that every Jewish baby boy would perish in the Nile. Two mothers, with the assistance of a sister, contravened that order, setting the stage for our complete redemption.

It did not escape *Chazal* that our national existence has often depended on the courage of women. The midwives, *Yocheved*, *Miryam*, and *Batya* are not alone in their eyes.

בזכות נשים צדקניות נגאלו ממצרים.

שבת שלום



