



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Pinchas

HAMELECH

Double Beating

“And the name of the Israelite who was smitten – who was smitten with the Midianess – Zimri ben Salu, prince of the household of Shimon. And the name of the woman who was smitten, the Midianess – Cosby bat Zur, head of a household of Midian he was.”

Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh explains the double terminology of being smitten in reference to Zimri. The name of a person describes his essence, his spiritual entity. At the time of the sin, Zimri's name – his spiritual essence – was smitten. Later on, when Pinchas came along, he was physically smitten as well.

What's in a Name

Our Parasha is full of names, some good and some otherwise. All over Gemara and Medrashim, our Sages are busy deriving hints from names of people about their deeds or travails, successes and failures.

Let's go back to Zimri for a minute. R' Yochanan teaches (Sanhedrin 82b) that he had five names: “Zimri” because he became like a scrambled egg, “ben Salu” because he defamed his family, “Shaul” because he lent himself to sin, “ben HaKenaanit” because he acted like a Cannanite,

and his real name was “Shelumiel ben Surishadai”.

Cosby's real name was Shvilnai, why was she called Cosby? Because she defied her father or because she told him, “With me, you will be able to slaughter this nation.”

Why is Bilaam called Bilaam? (Sanhedrin 105a) For he was “belo am” – nationless, or because he tried to do away with the Chosen Nation.

Names of Yisroel

Later on in the parashah, Bnei Yisroel are counted, and many family names are listed in the process. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh addresses many of these names and divulges allusions regarding those families, their tribe, or messages to Klal Yisroel at large. We will mention a few.

(26:19) Eir and Onan allude to the destruction of the Batei Mikdash. Sheila represents Moshiach, the final redeemer, as do Peretz and Zerach. Peretz's sons Chetzron and Chomil represent that Hashem will build the courtyard of the Beit Hamikdash and will be compassionate towards us.

Yissachar was a ben Torah. His name alludes to the infinite reward for Torah learning. All good things were created to reward one who learns



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Torah. He will receive 310 worlds of pleasure. Yissachar's sons are "Tola" – "a worm", a gentle, bendable, soft creature. A ben Torah has good midot. He is humble and yielding. Also, a worm is powerful with its mouth. It can eat away at strong wood. So too, a ben Torah's power lies in his mouth, as indicated by Yissachar's next son "Puvah" or "Puni". His mouth is a holy vessel. It was not given for wasteful words or to enjoy physical delicacies. It is to be devoted to Torah study.

"Yashuv" – learned in Yeshivah, calmly answered and arranged the subject matter.

"Shimron" – a ben Torah ought to exercise more caution than others in his exemplary behavior, Etc.

Reuven and Rut

In Berachot 7b, we are taught to behold the amazing things Hashem does in this world, all hinted to in people's names. Of the examples given there are "Reuven" – "See the difference between my son [Reuven] and my in-law's son [Eisav]. So said his mother Leah, prophetically. "Rut", as her great-grandson, Dovid, would "quench" Hashem's thirst, so to say, by singing to Him songs and praises.

Animals and People

There is a whole lot going on in giving a name. Hashem Yitbarach made a big deal over Adam HaRishon giving names to each species of animals. (Bereishit 2:19) Rabbeinu Bechaye explains how the Hebrew letters which form each name describe the essence of that particular being.

Sometimes people need a name change. We are taught that changing a name can help a person gain access to something which was previously not intended for him. For example, Avraham Avinu saw in the stars that he could not have children. Hashem added a letter to his name and changed a letter in his wife's name and, lo and behold, they were able to have a son.

It was most significant that Klal Yisroel in Mitzrayim kept their names and did not adopt Egyptian ones. Some explain that Pharaoh changed the midwives' names to Egyptian names, thinking that thereby they would develop corrupt tendencies and would acquiesce to his wishes and commands.

Yaakov Avinu was given the additional name Yisroel to prepare him and his progeny for a new stage in life and history and destiny. Each of the Shevatim was given a name based on his mother's perspective in her personal life, a name



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which also reflected Klal Yisroel in exile and redemption (R' Bechaye, P' Shemot).

The Wicked

"The name of the wicked shall rot." Says R' Elazar: We do not call others by their names. Apparently, doing so would honor the wicked and confer evil tendencies upon the soul of the young child (Yoma 38b).

R' Meir would look into a person's name to determine his trustworthiness. The Gemara mentions an occasion in which R' Meir was saved from thieves by discovering their true nature, based upon their names (Yoma 83b).

What's Your Letter?

Medrash Talpiot divides all letters of the Alphabet into four categories, responding to the four basic elements, as follows: Alef, Hei, Tet, Mem, Pei, Shin, Nut Sofit – fire; Gimmel, Zayin, Chof, Samech, Kuf, Kof Sofit & Pei Sofit – wind; Dalet, Chet, Lamed, Ayin, Reish, Mem Sofit – water; Bet, Vav, Yud, Nun, Tzadi, Tav, Tzadi Sofit – earth.

Anyone whose name starts with a letter corresponding to a certain element, will share certain tendencies of that element. The other letters of the name are also of significance, but the opening letter is the dominating factor.

Thus, someone named 'Moshe', for example, will share many of the tendencies of fire.

Pick A Name

Parents should give some thought before choosing a name for their child. They should not just pick a name out of the hat and certainly should not make up a name never before used. They must realize that the name they give their child will have a great bearing on the child's ability to succeed in life.

An angel told Rav Yosef Karo that Biblical names will provide the child with similar tendencies to those Biblical figures. For example, a child called Avraham will naturally be inclined to help others. A boy named Yosef will have an easier time controlling his passions and he may end up as a great benefactor.

By Your Name and in Your Place

In Yoma (38a), Ben Azai teaches: In your name you will be called, in your place you will be seated, and you will be given what rightfully belongs to you. No man can touch that which is designated for another, nor does any kingdom infringe upon another, even a hairsbreadth.

This is such a powerful line. It should be reviewed often. If more people would be aware



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of it and internalize it, there would be a lot fewer quarrels and disappointments. The world would be a much happier place.

Ben Yehoyada finds in this phrase an additional allusion. "In your name you will be called" means that parents are given a subliminal message as to which name they ought to call their child, based on what most suitably applies to his/her spiritual/emotional composition. Parents can choose to ignore these subliminal messages, and give a different name altogether, but then they are doing a great injustice to the child, as his life will be governed by conflicting forces.

Adds Ben Yehoyada: Every person's name is either alluded to or explicit in a certain place in the Torah. The surrounding passages communicate that particular individual's life mission and experiences.

Additionally, whatever name a child is given, will escort him his entire lifetime, and once again in the world of souls and resurrection. Being that it has bearing for all of eternity, the act of naming is not to be taken lightly.

A Bit More on Names

The Mabit (I:276) says not to name a child after Biblical names which appear prior to Avraham

Avinu. Responsa Yosef Ometz strongly advises against naming children after wicked characters.

Sometimes, a name is added on later in life, such as to an ill individual, hoping that his new name will give him a new identity, and simultaneously, a new lease on life. In the event that an accomplished and sagacious Torah scholar advises a name change, in most instances, Rav Ovadiah Yosef suggests adding a name, but not cancelling the previous one (Yabia Omer V:21:3). The same would hold true for those who care to add a name in order to allow for marriage, wishing to avoid a situation in which mother-in-law and daughter-in-law would carry identical names.

Even those called by nicknames, such as affectionately or for convenience, should also be called or referred to occasionally by their real name, as that will help them develop into the person they were meant to be.

May we merit to name our children after righteous individuals and forebears and in any instance of doubt, consult a competent Torah authority, for the effects are far-reaching.

Shabbat Shalom!

Mordechai Malka