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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

NAMES ARE A CENTRAL PART OF LIFE. A COMPANY WILL PAY HUGE SUMS FOR a snappy name for their product. As individuals we are very interested in our own names - we generally love hearing our name said and, especially, seeing it in print. On one level it is therefore no surprise that at the very beginning of the Sedra¹ we read “And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt”, followed by a list of the sons of Jacob, ancestors of the Jewish people.

The story of how they and their children came to Egypt is, of course, the story of how they eventually became slaves. This was our first ‘exile’ and, the Sages tell us, it was in a spiritual sense the root of all future times of Exile for the Jewish people. The longest of these is the present Exile, which began with the destruction of the Second Temple almost two millennia ago. Although many Jews have lived in the Land of Israel during the past two thousand years, obviously including the millions who live there today, as a people we are still in Exile. Exile means threat, attack, oppression, being beset by enemies.

While on the one hand today, worldwide, we are more free as a people and as individuals than we have ever been in the past, on the other we are still threatened by powerful enemies.



In Loving Memory of Menashy ben Yechezkel Ezra ע"ה
24 Tevet - Dedicated by his Family שי'

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The opposite of Exile is Redemption: that will mean a true freedom not only for us the Jewish people, but for all humanity. Remember that those who hate us, are themselves victims of evil. Redemption will mean an ultimate positive transformation for everyone.

Now, this brings us back to the list of names at the beginning of the Sedra. Who went into Egypt to become slaves and to begin the long cycle of repeated Exile? Our *names*. Not us, but our names....

Wait a minute! Didn't you say that a name is important... ??

Yes! The name of a person is very important - up to a point. Beyond that point, beyond the name, there is the person's *essence*. Chassidic teachings tell us that our name is our external aspect, the way we are known by other people. Deep within our own selves we encounter our innermost being on a level quite beyond our surname, first name or even nickname.

Now, the Sedra is telling us that only our *names* went into Egypt. Only our names, our external aspect, went into Exile.

Our innermost being, our essence, is free. It has always been free. It was never enslaved in Egypt and it has never been subject to any force of Exile at all. Further, our inner essence gives a boundlessly positive input to our daily selves, helping us face up to the challenges around us. Our essence is the source of a constant sense of liberation now, and is also the key to our future Redemption.

Throughout our history, however difficult the pain and anxieties of Exile, we have been sustained by the deep and often unspoken knowledge that our essence is free and is beyond all terror and all forces of oppression.

By linking with our essence, through observance of Torah teachings and by keeping the Mitzvot, we bring that limitless power into play in our own lives, leading to our own Redemption and that of all humanity².

1. Exodus 1:1-6:1. 2. Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.3 pp.843-48.

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SEDRA SHEMOT

HELPING

Daniel pulled off his coat, rivulets of waters running off the garment onto the floor. “Gosh, it’s pouring out there”. His little sister Esther poked her head out of the living-room. “Who was that boy you were walking home with tonight, Daniel?” she asked curiously.

Daniel pulled his wet shoes off and padded into the living room. “He’s a new boy in my class. His name is Immanuel. His family comes from Argentina. He speaks Spanish really well, but he speaks English verrrry slooowly. He asks the teacher to repeat everything ten times, he....”

Esther raised her eyebrows. Daniel noticed.

“Oh my, this isn’t very nice of me. He really is a very friendly person, it is just that he slows down the whole class so much. And plus, our math teacher, Mr. Hartman, has asked me if I can help Immanuel do his math homework tonight. I’ll never finish my own homework if I work with him!”

Esther looked surprised. “You do sound grumpy! Why don’t you want to help this new boy? You’re not usually like that!”

Daniel shrugged his shoulders and walked over to the hot radiator and tried to get warm and dry his clothes. "Aaahh. Warmth..." he said. Then he added "Actually I have to call him to tell him what time to come over, and I think that I just won't bother. He doesn't know our phone number, so he won't come!"

Esther chewed her pencil thoughtfully. "You're not being very kind. You remind me of something interesting my teacher taught us today. Moses had to run away from Egypt, and came to Midian. There he saw a very strange sight.

"There was a group of seven girls who approached the well to give water to their sheep. However, the other shepherds would not allow them to get to the well. Instead, they pushed the girls away.

"When Moses saw this, even though he was a stranger in Midian, and even though he did not know these girls, nevertheless, he went over and helped them. He got water from the well and gave their sheep to drink."

"I know that story", said Daniel. "Those girls turned out to be the daughters of Yitro. Eventually Moses married one of them, named Tziporah".

"You're right", said Esther. "But he didn't know he was going to do that when he helped them. He just saw they needed help - so he did whatever he could to help them".

Daniel looked a bit embarrassed. "I suppose you mean I should learn a lesson from Moses..."

He was silent for a few moments. Then he said, "You are right. Of course I should help Immanuel...." He picked up the phone and began dialling.

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