

TORAH & HORAAH



Shemos 5778

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Dear Reader,

The Book of Shemos is defined by Chazal as the book of exile and redemption. It opens with the exile of the Children of Israel in Egypt, continues with their miraculous redemption, and concludes with reaching the destiny of the Shechinah dwelling among Israel.

The exile and redemption from Egypt is among the most central themes of the Jewish religion. Aside from the mitzvah of recalling the *Yetzias Mitzrayim* twice daily, a great number of mitzvos are performed with the express intention of remembering the redemption.

Even when the Torah was given, the opening words are: “I am Hashem, your G-d, who brought you

This week’s article discusses the nature of names and the halachos pertaining to naming children. Is it permitted to name a child with a non-Jewish name? Should two names be given, and what is their significance? Can names be changed? These questions, among others, are discussed below.

This week’s Q & A addresses the question of using a plunger to clear a blocked toilet on Shabbos.

It’s All About the Name

The book of Shemos opens with the names of the sons of Yaakov who descended to Egypt. The Torah’s lists of names, which occur not only Shemos but in many *parshios* across the Torah (and in particular in the book of Bereishis), shows that there is significance in a particular name. Names are important, and the Torah makes a point of recording them.

We take the opportunity to investigate some of the *halachos* and customs that relate to giving children names. Is it permitted to name a child with a non-Jewish name? Should two names be given, and what is their significance? Can names be changed? These questions, among others, are discussed below.

The Importance of Names

The Gemara states that “a name is the cause,” meaning that the name of a person has an influence on a person’s inner nature and basic character traits. Chazal also relate the tale of Rabbi Meir, who was “particular about names.”

Rabbi Meir was once traveling together with Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yosi, when the three arrived at an inn. Rabbi Meir found out that the name of the innkeeper was Kiddur. Rabbi ➤➤

forth from the Land of Egypt.” Hashem does not present himself as the G-d who created the world, but as the G-d who brought us forth from Egypt.

What are the central themes that we are to learn from the foundational tale of exile and redemption?

The Ramban explains that the central theme of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is the belief in the Divine direction never ceases to accompany us. From the open, revealed miracles of our redemption from Egypt, we realize that the everyday events that fill our lives are also miracles – hidden miracles, but miracles nonetheless.

Together with this theme, however, is the issue of *hakaras ha-tov*: gratitude. The exile began, as the Torah describes, when Pharaoh “did not know Yosef.” The ingratitude of Pharaoh for the salvation that Yosef brought Egypt was the foundation on which the exile was built. Moshe, in stark contrast, exemplifies the trait of gratitude: He could not

Meir knew that the name was related to the verse “for they belong to a generation of upheaval,” and that this implied that the innkeeper was a wicked person. Accordingly, Rabbi Meir refrained from depositing his belongings with the innkeeper. His companions, who didn’t attach significance to names, deposited their money with the innkeeper, who subsequently denied the deposit. Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yosi thereafter conceded the importance of looking into names.

Moreover, the *Arizal (Gilgulim, Introduction 23)* writes that the name parents give to their child is placed into their minds by Divine influence, in accordance with the soul of the child. Parents often consider choosing names a matter of taste, or of family respect. Although this is also true, one should be aware that the matter is also far loftier than it might appear.

On account of the influence a person’s name has on his inner nature and character, Chazal state (*Tanchuma, Haazinu 8*) that a person should “name his child with a name worthy of a *tzaddik*, for sometimes a name can bring good, or bring ill.” It seems that Chazal chose to use the word “sometimes” to indicate that, although a person always retains his free will, his name can influence the ways he chooses.

The *Maggid Meisharim* therefore writes that a person whose name is Avraham will be inclined toward *chessed*, Yitzchak towards *gevurah*, and so on.

May One Use Non-Jewish Names

Based on the above introduction, we can well understand that a person should not name his child with the name of someone wicked, since this can have a bad influence. Does this principle also apply to ordinary non-Jewish names?

A short historical analysis will reveal that many Jews, over all generations, were called by non-Jewish names. Even in the Gemara (*Gittin 11*) we find that, “most of the Jews outside of Israel are called by non-Jewish names.” Some of the *amoraim* themselves were called by names that are clearly not of Jewish origin, such as Rav Papa, Rav Zevid, and so on.

Based on this phenomenon, Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggros Moshe, Orach Chaim, vol. 4, no. 64*) writes that although the use of non-Jewish names is not recommended (in *Even HaEzer*

3:35 he frowns on the practice, calling it *meguneh*), there is no prohibition against using those names. He adds, as we have noted, that many Jewish leaders over the generations were called by non-Jewish names, mentioning *Maggid Mishnah* (Vidal) and the father of *Rambam* (Maimon) as examples.

Rav Moshe explains that the reason for this phenomenon is that after the names are integrated within the Jewish community, there is no longer any concern in using them. This is especially prominent in Germanic names that were adopted by Jews, and effectively became “Jewish” names.

Shut Maharashdam (Yoreh De’ah 199) goes further and writes that although there is a general prohibition of emulating non-Jews, this prohibition applies only to their dress and custom, but not to names. By contrast, the *Maharam Schick (Yoreh De’ah 169)* writes that calling a person by a non-Jewish name transgresses a Torah prohibition(!) because of the issue of emulating non-Jews, adding that having a corresponding Jewish name for being called up to the Torah does not help. However this position is not generally accepted in *halacha*.

Rav Moshe explains that although the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba*, chap. 32) mentions as a virtue of the Jewish people in Egypt that they did not change their names (as cited by *Maharam Schick* in support of his position), it is possible that this virtue was limited to the pre-Torah era. Before receiving the Torah, the names of the Jewish people helped set them apart from non-Jews and avoid assimilation. After we have the Torah, however, the mitzvos of the Torah fulfill this purpose and there is no longer a need to name children with specifically Jewish names.

A famous and long-standing custom among Ashkenazy Jewry was the Chol Kreisch ceremony, in which a child was given his non-Jewish name to be used in everyday life (the custom is mentioned by *Mahram Mintz* of the fifteenth century and by other authorities). Over the years this custom lost popularity in Eastern Europe, and today it is practiced only by die-hard followers of the German tradition.

Naming with Two Names

Rav Moshe concludes his responsum by quoting the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba 37:7*), which states that whereas in times

bring himself to strike the river Nile, because the river had once saved his life.

Before reaching the matter of Divine providence, the Ramban introduces the fundamental purpose of man in this world: “The Upper G-d has no desire in the creation, other than that man should know, and should thank Hashem for creating him.” Beyond our belief, the first fundamental is that we are to know Hashem, and to thank Him. In the words of the verse: “It is good to thank Hashem.”

In order to find, within ourselves, gratitude towards Hashem, we must first labor to express our gratitude towards our fellow man. Saying “thank you” is not always easy; meaning it is still harder. But by teaching ourselves the art of gratitude, we will be able to apply the lesson even to Hashem.

From thanking Hashem for the “faith of the nights,” may we speedily reach the gratitude for the “kindness of the day.”

of yore, names were chosen based on events, today we should name our children for our ancestors. Based on this, Rav Moshe writes that it is therefore correct to name a child with the name of his ancestors, even if the name is not a Jewish name.

Often children are given two names even when named for an ancestor who had just one name. The question, however, is whether adding extra names is considered legitimate or does the extra name detract from the effect of naming after somebody?

From the wording of *Shut Igros Moshe (ibid.)*, it emerges that there is no concern in adding extra names, and the child would still be considered as named after the deceased ancestor. When asked concerning naming a daughter after an ancestor who died young, he writes that one should add an extra name, and “there is no concern in doing so.” This is also explicit in an additional responsum of Rav Moshe (*Igros Moshe, Yoreh De’ah*, vol. 2, no. 122).

A similar ruling emerges from *Ikrei Dinim (Yoreh De’ah* no. 26), who writes that a person should name his firstborn son after his own father (meaning, the deceased father of the child’s father). If the child’s mother insists that the child be named after her own father, and the child’s father wishes to appease her, the child should be named with both names, and by doing so there is no offense to the honor of the father’s father (he adds that there is a *segulah* for avoiding infant mortality by calling a child two names).

However, Maran HaRav Aharon Leib Steinman *zt”l (Ayeles Hashachar, Matos 32:42)* writes, citing the *Chazon Ish*, that when a name is added, it becomes somewhat of a different name. A possible proof to this position is from the

concept of changing one’s name (see below), which is usually done by adding a name to the previous name.

Sometimes, a second name is given that remains unused, added just to honor a deceased relative. It should be noted that a name that is never used is not, strictly speaking, considered a person’s name. Our names are what we are called by, and not names given to us at birth (or at the *bris*). This matter is complicated when it comes to writing a *get* (divorce document), but we will not expound on this at this time.

Bad Omens in Naming

One of the most common concerns in naming after a deceased relative is the concern for a possible bad omen. Therefore, many people avoid naming a child after a person who was killed, died young, or died without children.

One of the first sources for this concern is a teaching of *Yam Shel Shlomo* (Gittin chap. 4, no. 31), who writes that it is customary to use the name Yeshayah, rather than the name Yeshayahu, because Yeshayahu, the prophet, was killed.

The Rema (*Even Ha’ezer 129:26*), however, writes that the name Gedalyahu is spelled with the final letter vav. *Beis Shmuel* (129, letter *yud*) writes that it appears he disputes the position of *Yam Shel Shlomo*, according to whom the standard for Gedalyahu would be to write the name without the final letter vav, since the Gedalyahu of the Tanach was killed.

However, *Shut Chasam Sofer (Even Ha’ezer*, vol. 2, no. 25), writes that there is no dispute over the matter, and all opinions agree that one should not call by a name that bodes evil for its bearer. He therefore writes that the name

Akiva should be written with a *hey* at the end, rather than an *aleph* (concerning Gedalyahu, he suggests that there was another great person called Gedalyahu, who did not die a premature death).

In this connection, we find an important *chiddush* in the *Iggros Moshe* (*Yoreh De'ah*, vol. 2, no. 122). He claims that naming a child after somebody who died young is not a bad omen. He cites Shmuel and Shlomo as examples of biblical characters who did not live long, yet their names are not avoided. However, he adds that it stands to reason that naming after somebody who did not have children is, indeed, a bad omen, and should be avoided. The general custom, it should be noted, is not in accordance with Rav Moshe's *chiddush*. People generally avoid giving a child the name of somebody who died young.

Rav Moshe writes further that a subtle change in a name is sufficient to alleviate the problem in naming of bad omens. An example, as noted before, is the change from Yeshayahu to Yeshayah. Alternatively, he writes that adding a second name will also solve the problem.

A third way of solving the problem is suggested by the *Steipler* (*Karyono De'igresa*, vol. 2, no. 149). His novel suggestion is that, for example, if a person wishes to name his son Avraham to perpetuate the name of an ancestor of that name who was killed, he should name him Avraham but have in mind Avraham Avinu.

An additional issue in naming children is the matter of calling boys after a deceased female relative, such as calling Sariel after Sarah, or girls after a deceased male relative, such as Tziviah after Tzvi, or Ariella after Ariel. It stands

to reason that these names are not the same, and the 'calling after' deceased relative should be limited to boys for men, and girls for women.

Shut Divrei Malkiel (vol. 3, no. 75) and *Tzitz Eliezer* (vol. 11, no. 56), who discuss the calling of a brother and a sister by names that are derived from the same root, such as Eliezer and Eliezra, and also mention the idea of calling a girl by a boy's name, and vice versa. Both ideas are frowned on, yet the *Tzitz Eliezer* writes that they are permitted where necessary.

Changing Names

As noted above, names have a deep significance for a person's nature and character. For this reason, people do not change a person's name, without due cause. However, when a person is in grave danger, Rema writes that it is customary to change a person's name, because the change of name is liable to bring about a change in fortune.

One of the common questions of changing names today is that of *baalei teshuvah*, who were born to secular parents, and now wish to change their secular name to a Torah name. Even in this regard, *poskim* write that a person should not rush to change his name, for doing so is a meaningful act. However, Rav Mordechai Gross writes (*Shema Garim*, Chap. 3 no. 5) that if a person was given a name that has no connection with anything Jewish, then it is appropriate for him to change his name.

Although the ordinary method of changing names is to add an extra name to the original name, under special circumstances it might even be worthy to entirely uproot the original name, and to be called by an entirely new name.

Halachic Responsa to Questions that have been asked on our website dinonline.org



The Question:

If a toilet gets clogged on Shabbos, can one use a plunger to fix the toilet in case of need?

It is permitted to use the plunger where necessary. Where possible, one should turn to a non-Jew to help, or at least use one's weaker hand.



Sources:

The Shulchan Aruch writes (Orach Chaim 336:9) that if a drainage gutter is blocked with grass and straw, causing a leak in one's home, it is permitted to clear it with one's feet, by means of a *shinui* (an unconventional method).

The reason for this is that in case of a great loss, the Sages did not enact the prohibition involved (of clearing by means of a *shinui*).

The Mishnah Berurah explains that one can clear the blockage so that it won't interfere with the water flow, but it is forbidden to totally remove the blockage. This involves a prohibition of *boneh*, building.

Some authorities draw a distinction between a drain and a toilet, ruling that one can be lenient to use a plunger. The Be'er Moshe explains that in the case of a toilet, one needs only to push some of the blockage through (like pushing cocoa through a blocked straw) to fix the problem, and this is permitted. This is also stated by "Binyan Shabbos," pp. 18, 303, in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

The Minchas Yitzchak (5:75) is also lenient concerning a toilet, because it is very easy to clear the toilet adding that because clearing a toilet often involves an issue of *kavod ha-brios* (human dignity), there is special room for leniency. However, the Minchas Yitzchak writes that one should preferably use a non-Jew, or his weaker hand.

By contrast with the opinions above, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe 4:73) writes that one may only unclog a toilet with a plunger if it is partially stuffed, and water can still flow through (it is then permitted to use the plunger if it can be cleared with one or two pushes).

He adds that if a toilet is regularly clogged, it is permitted to clear it, because this is not considered fixing. However if the toilet is totally stuffed, and this does not occur regularly, then it is considered a *maaseh uman* (expert labor) to clear it, and is forbidden on account of *uvda de-chol*. If there is a great need and an issue of *kevod ha-briyos*, one can clear the toilet by means of a non-Jew.

Because clearing the toilet is a pressing issue and involves *kevod ha-briyos*, one can rely on the lenient opinions where necessary.