

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Kayla *bas* Moshe *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Moshe’s Name

PARSHAS SHEMOS 5778

On the surface, the naming of Klal Yisrael’s beloved leader and redeemer was a straightforward matter, though conducted under extraordinary circumstances. Fearing the Egyptian decree of extermination, Moshe’s mother Yocheved set him afloat on the river in a basket of sorts, where he was found by none other than Pharaoh’s daughter. The baby’s sister, Miriam, arranged for his mother to serve as the nursemaid, with the provision that she would return the child to Pharaoh’s daughter upon his weaning. Sure enough, the commitment was fulfilled, as stated in this week’s *parshah*: וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבִאֵהוּ לְבַת־פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי־לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ – “And the boy grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he was to her as a son; and she called his name ‘Moshe,’ and she said: ‘For I drew him from the water’” (*Shemos 2:10*).

As stated, the facts seem straightforward enough: 1) Pharaoh’s daughter named the child. 2) She called him “Moshe.” 3) His name relates to the fact that he was “drawn” (*mishisi’hu*) from the water. But as we shall see, none of these suppositions are really that simple.

Language Issues

One matter the commentators raise is the fact that Pharaoh’s daughter was Egyptian and presumably spoke Egyptian. How, then, did she suddenly know *Lashon Hakodesh* (Hebrew), to the extent that she could confer a Hebrew name on the child based on a Hebrew explanation (וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם מָשִׁיתִהוּ) – “And she called his name ‘Moshe,’ and she said: ‘For I drew him from the water’”)?

On this score, there are those who suggest (*Da’as Zekeinim, Ibn Ezra*) that she in fact either learned the language from the Jews or simply asked them for the Hebrew. However, the Chizkuni submits that actually it wasn’t Pharaoh’s daughter at all who gave the name “Moshe.” Rather, the subject of the *passuk* is Moshe’s real mother Yocheved, and he renders the verse accordingly: “*Vatikra shmo Moshe* – And she (i.e., Yocheved) called his name Moshe.” Upon hearing this, Pharaoh’s daughter asked Yocheved about the name, to which the mother responded that it is Hebrew for “drawing forth.” To this, Pharaoh’s daughter replied (presumably in her own language) that the name is quite fitting, for, after all, “I drew him from the water.”

It should be noted, furthermore, that there are those who contend that indeed, Pharaoh’s daughter did not originate the name “Moshe.” The Ibn Ezra, quoting ancient historical sources, states that she actually gave him an Egyptian name – “Munius” – which the Torah translates into “Moshe.” However, the Oznayim LaTorah, quoting the Netziv, states that “Moshe” is indeed an Egyptian name, which was conferred by Pharaoh’s daughter, and it means “the king’s child.” This gives rise to another issue, however; from the continuation of the *passuk*, it appears that the name is derived from and refers to the “drawing from the water”; but according to the Oznayim LaTorah, the name means nothing of the sort.

Naming Rights

And so, the Oznayim LaTorah explains this aspect in a different manner. The matter may be likened to the laws pertaining to lost objects, as delineated in the Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 2:5):

כָּל דָּבָר שֶׁיֵּשׁ בוֹ סִימָנִים וְיֵשׁ לוֹ תוֹבְעִים חֲבִיב לְהַכְרִיז.

“Regarding any object that has identifying indicators, and has claimants – one is obligated to announce (the finding).”

This latter requirement of “*yeish lo tovim* – it has claimants” states that as long as the owner retains his interest in recovering his item, the finder is obligated to return it. But in circumstances in which he relinquishes his connection, the finder is authorized to keep it for himself. One example the Gemara provides is an object that is swept away by a river – presumably, the owner no longer hopes to recover it, and so the finder may keep it (*Bava Metzia* 24a). In a similar fashion, then, Pharaoh’s daughter “recovered” Moshe from the river, thus gaining the “rights” to name and raise the baby as her son. As such, when the verse states “for I drew him from the water,” it refers not so much to the meaning of his name (which, according to the Oznayim LaTorah, is “the king’s son”), but to the reason why she had the right to grant the name in the first place.

There is one other matter on this subject worth mentioning, and that is the fascinating interpretation the *Pardes Yosef* applies to this *passuk*. He also gives quite a novel rendering of the phrase “for I drew him from the water.” This is based on an exegetical device, similar to (but distinct from) the standard notion of “*gematria*” (numerical value of Hebrew letters), known as “*mispar ha’kadmiyim* – preceding numbers.” As we know, each of the letters has its numerical value, with א as 1, ב as 2, ג as 3, etc. What this method entails is an inclusion of each preceding value; that is, א is 1, ב is 2 + 1 = 3, ג is 3 + 2 + 1 = 6, etc.

In any event, applying this device to the letter מ yields 145 and to the letter י yields 55. Thus, the word “*mayim*” – מ-י-מ – is the equivalent of 145 + 55 + 145 = 345. This is also the (regular) *gematria* of the name מֹשֶׁה (40 + 300 + 5 = 345).

This, then, is an alternate meaning of the *passuk*. Rather than referring to Moshe’s being extricated from the waters of the river, the intent is for the numeric device of “*mispar hakadmiyim*.” That is, the derivation of Moshe’s name, using this method, comes from the word “*mayim*.” וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִרְהַמַּיִם מִשִּׁיתָהּ – She called his name “Moshe” because she “pulled it out” from the (word) “*mayim*” (*Otzros HaTorah, parshas Shemos*).

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