

Freedom & Liberty by Eyal Goldman

In a week from today, Sunday night, Jews from all over the world will sit around the Passover table with their families and friends. On that night they'll be drinking wine, eating Matzahs and most importantly they'll be telling the origin story of the Israelites, fulfilling the Mitzvah of Passover, telling our sons and daughters the story of our salvation, from Slaves in Egypt to free people in our own land.

Growing up, hearing these stories, taught me never to take for granted this idea of freedom, especially being born to a group of people, that freedom has been deprived many times in history. Even today as we face many challenges around the world, Jews are commanded to remember our history with fighting for our future by using the present to advocate freedom and truth. The story of the Exodus has incredible lessons for the pursuit of freedom perhaps even a blueprint. Although in this article I'd like to focus on one lesson, the lesson of names.



The phrase "Freedom has Price" has always connected in my thoughts to the phrase "Name you Price". The idea that freedom doesn't come for free connects beautifully to the idea the whatever freedom you are fighting for you need to name its price and prepare to pay that price if needed. In the bible you can find many examples to this lesson, God told Abraham the price for knowing him was to sacrifice his only son and Abraham was willing to pay that price and Moses was asked from God to set his people free with a great toll on his life that ended up with Moses not entering the Holy Land, sacrificing everything to liberate the Israelites.

What brings Abraham and Moses to commit so strongly to an idea? If the story of Passover inspires us, what inspired them? I think this question could be answered in many ways but I'd like to focus on one concept, NAMES.

The Book of Exodus opens with a listing Jacob's sons and they're descendants, the first thing that we all probably take for granted is the bible specifying names, presenting the family members who came down to Egypt and settled during the reign of Joseph & Pharaoh.

“Now these are the **NAMES** of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob” (Exodus 1:1)



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The specification of names is common as we read the Bible. We know that between Adam and Noah 10 generations and they're names were detailed and between Noah and Abraham another count of 10 generations is mentioned with specific details regarding those

who came between (For example Enoch, which was said that he walked the Earth with God). But the count the story of the Exodus is unique because it starts with a count that gave the title for the whole book, in Hebrew the books of Exodus is the book of SHMOT which means, NAMES.

Traditionally the first word of any book and Torah portion¹ gives it its name but here it presents something else, an added value.

A few generations after the Israelites came to Egypt, Pharaoh, the one that hadn't heard of Joseph, enslaves the Israelites and commands to throw all male first borns to the Nile.

As the text details the events, you can notice that the main characters beside Moses lack NAMES! or they are using Egyptians names, For Example:

Israelites become Hebrews - Being described by their language and not their Nationality.

Shifra & Pua - Which according to the scholars were Yocheved (Moses's Mom) and Miriam (Moses Sister).

Pharaoh - a title of the king of Egypt but not its birth name.

The Hebrew Man - a hebrew guy that was whipped by an Egyptian soldier.

The Hebrew Man fighting a Hebrew Man - Both Israelites slaves with no names

Daughter of Pharaoh - Which according to Rabbinical Scholars was named Batya. a few more examples is the Moses's father, Amram, that is not mentioned by name but descended of the tribe of Levi. Aaron the great priest and Moses's older brother is not mentioned till a later stage.

The text is telling us by the lack of names that all characters are enslaved, all characters might exist but they don't have an identity as the people of Israel.

I believe this is more than just a hint on the status of the Israelites in Egypt, I believe its a warning!

Names are the first way to identify ourselves, names have different meanings that speaks about who we are. If you take our names away or name us all with one name, part of the way we identify and interact with each other will eliminate. Cultures that are based on language and give meaning behind our names will slowly fade.



The Daughter of Pharaoh and Miriam

¹ Torah Portion - The weekly reading of the Torah, on Saturdays, in synagogues.

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An example for “success” came during the Holocaust. The Jews that were sent to concentration camps and said goodbye to the names, they were marked with numbers like cattle, by the Nazis. “Take away their names and they’ll forget who they’re really are”, basically end of culture! many examples exist for this method. Cattle get numbers and not names

because its easier not to attach to something that is a number. In the army when we become soldiers we get numbers to represent that we are all equal and working as a unit, becoming a type of “slave” to the army or nation (in this case its important to cancel oneself for the sake of a greater idea like freedom but the idea is still canceling your name for becoming part of something bigger).



As the story goes on, Moses flees Egypt and goes on a journey to discover who he is. Raised in the palace, Moses goes to the desert to learn who he really is and names play a key role in this journey. As Moses wanders the desert he meets Zipporah (Moses’s future wife), Jethro’s daughter, near the well, Moses rescues her and meets Jethro for the first time. What amazing in this bit is that Zipporah is the first name explicitly said, besides Moses since the original

count of the Israelites in the beginning of the book.

This is not a random meeting, God leads Moses in the desert and introduces him to a tribe of Midianites, lead by Jethro. This tribe is a tribe of free people, the exact opposite of the Israelites in Egypt, the proof - Names. The Midianties have names! even the women, which back then were second class to men, have names and meaning, Zipporah = God’s Bird. Moses came to a free society to learn how to lead his people, to give them meaning and most importantly hope. Moses had to go to the Midianites to learn the essence of being free.

This lesson of names wasn’t learned in the easy way. After God spoke to Moses and commanded him to free the Israelites, Moses went back to Egypt with his wife Zipporah and both of their sons. On the road to Egypt, an Angel appeared asking at night asking to kill Moses’s children for they weren’t circumcised according to tradition. Zipporah, right away got up took a sharp rock and circumcised the children and everyone was saved. This story appears it



Moses and Zipporah
from the Movie The Ten Commandments, 1956

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seems unrelated to the main story but its an important lesson that Moses almost failed learning.

In Judaism, eight days after a baby boy is born we circumcise the baby. This ceremony that goes back to the days of Abraham has to parts to it. First the circumcision itself and second giving the baby a name.

We don't name the baby at birth or before those eight days are over. The act of circumcision in Judaism creates to parts of the baby's identity: The baby's covenant with God and the Jewish faith and his name. These two elements are crucial for creating the identity of an individual and the beginning of his walk on this earth.

Moses named his kids as they were born but did not circumcised his boys hence depriving them from their freedom, the freedom you can demand when you have a name! Zipporah, not like Moses, came from a culture of freedom, individuality and understood what Moses couldn't understand being born to a slave nation and raised in royalty which is a form of enslavement.

Moses comes back to Egypt and the rest of the story is known to all, the Israelites got there identity back and became a nation of free people, walking the desert, renaming every place that the Israelites encountered as part of their new journey, peaking at Mount Sinai when receiving the Commandments. On

This journey through names shows that the way to true freedom begins with the simple things, such as a name. This lesson can be learned on a personal level or on a national level. Around the world nations don't call the State of Israel by its name, they don't recognize the existence of Israel and use this simple technique of names to delegitimize our country. Hence the Israelite journey to freedom is not over, as we force the world to know that we are the Jewish People from the Land of Israel and we are here to stay! as its written:

“Behold, I build and house to the **NAME** of the **LORD** my God, to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shewbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the



This Passover we remember that Freedom has a price and before you pay that price, you name it!
Wishing you a happy and free Passover and a happy and free happy Easter,

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