

SHEMOS – 5770

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The Torah begins Sefer Shemot by listing the names of all eleven children who came to Mitzrayim with Yaakov. (1:2,3,4). Then (1:6) the name of Yosef is mentioned, as having died in Mitzrayim.

Shemot, the “Book of Names”, then continues further without mentioning any names.

A new king of Egypt arose, but no mention of any name, merely, “a new king” (1:8).

“A man from the house of Levi went and he took (married) a daughter of Levi” (2:1). We know the Torah is referring to Amram and Yocheved, but their names are not given here.

“The woman conceived and gave birth to a son”, (2:2), but no mention of the son’s name.

When the mother could no longer hide him from the Egyptians, she placed him in a basket among the reeds of the river. “His sister stationed herself at a distance to see what would be done with him (2:4)”, again, no mention of a name for his sister, (although we know it was Miriam).

“Par’oh’s daughter went down to bathe by the River. She saw the basket, sent her maidservants and she took it in” (2:5). - again, no mention of her name, though our Sages identify her name as, either Batya or Bitya, (meaning, daughter of G-d). She called him Moshe, as she said, “For I drew him from the water”(2:10). According to Ibn Ezra, this was an Egyptian name, and according to the Netziv, in the Egyptian language, this means “son”, meaning he is now my son. Thus, the first “new name” in the Book of Names, is that of Moshe. Ironically, the child already had several beautiful Hebrew names, most likely given by his mother, Yocheved. They were, Yered, Avigdor, Tov, Tuviah, Yekutiel, Chever, Socho, Zanuach, Shemaya, Gidor (Gemara Megilla 13a). Yet, the Torah, in the very next pasuk, (11), refers to him not by any of those Hebrew names, but as Moshe. With this we are introduced to Moshe Rabbeinu, our teacher, our leader, whose name will dominate the rest of the Torah.

Who has the right and privilege to name a child; the biological mother, who labored for nine months and gave birth to him, or the mother that rebelled against the unjust and inhuman laws of Par’oh and risked her life to save this child? This question and dispute frequently comes up in our modern day of life, between a biological mother and a surrogate mother. I believe the Torah is guiding us and leaning to one side in answer to that question.