

**Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch**

**Ohr Torah**

**Parshas Shemos**

**Siman #65**

**"These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt, etc., each man and his household came."**

At first glance, it is difficult: it should have said "each man and his household" at the end, after mentioning the names of the tribes.

It may be explained based on what is written in the holy Zohar: the entire Torah consists of the names of the Holy One, blessed be He. Even the names of people, above, are considered names. For example, the name "Reuven" refers to a combination of letters (the combination of letters in Reuven is a sacred name above). The lower Reuven (here) is called this combination because the root of his soul derives from this specific combination above. Similarly, this applies to the other names.

Even names of non-Jews, like Esau and Pharaoh, above they exist in holiness, as was explained in earlier discourses.

We can therefore say that this is hinted at in the verse: "These are the names, etc."—that is, one should not think this is merely a narrative of how they came to Egypt, but rather, all these are names.

And if you ask, "But are not the children of Israel specifically counted by their names?"—(as) how can one attribute human names to the holy names above? For this, the verse says: **"Each man and his household came."**

This means: the man refers to the holy combination above, while his household refers to the lower aspect. The combination above is clothed within the lower person, who is called by this name corresponding to the combination.

Therefore, the lower person is called "a house" relative to the higher name, which is the primary aspect, while the lower one is only considered a house for the root of his soul.

[NOTE: The passage explains that names in the Torah are not mere labels but reflect deep spiritual significance. Each person's name is connected to a higher, divine source—a "spiritual combination" of letters in holiness. The verse "Each man and his household came" illustrates that a person (referred to as "man") represents their higher spiritual root, while "household" symbolizes the earthly, physical vessel where this divine essence resides. Even names that seem mundane, like Esau or Pharaoh, have spiritual significance in their higher source.

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Every name, including your own, holds a profound spiritual connection to its divine source. A person's physical existence ("house") serves as a vessel for their higher soul. Recognizing this can inspire greater self-awareness, purpose, and appreciation for the sanctity of identity. END NOTE]

**Siman #66**

**"These are the names of the children of Israel."**

In the name of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory:

This can be understood in light of what is written, **"They have made Jerusalem a heap of ruins; they have given the corpses of Your servants as food for the birds of the sky"** (Psalms 79:1-2).

This means that when a person experiences some form of awe (fear of Heaven) or achieves some spiritual perfection in performing a mitzvah, it may bring them a sense of arrogance. This arrogance causes, in our many sins, exile in the world. The phrase **"They have made Jerusalem (ירושלים) a heap of ruins"** can be interpreted as making their **"complete awe" (יראה שלם)** into **"heaps" (עיים)**—symbolizing pride and self-importance.

If a person engages in any divine service, such as Torah study or prayer, but does so without reverence and love, it becomes like playing a musical instrument—a harp or lyre—without true devotion. This causes, Heaven forbid, their spiritual work to be captured by the forces of impurity (קליפות). This is the meaning of the verse: **"They have given the corpses of Your servants as food for the birds of the sky"**—referring to the forces of impurity, which are called "birds of the sky." This happens because they performed their service **like a harp (נבל)** without the proper intentions.

"These are the names of the children of Israel." This can be seen as an allusion to the causes of exile and desolation. The phrase "who came to Egypt" (מצרימה) hints at being in the constraints (מיצר) of exile. The Torah then lists the names, starting with Reuven. This suggests that when a person performs a spiritual act, they may think to themselves, "See (ראו) the difference between me and other people—I serve God with perfection, and it is fitting that God should listen to my voice (שמעון) and join with me (לוי)." And so on with the other names, illustrating the self-centeredness that may accompany one's service.

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**[Note: Summary**

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that spiritual arrogance, even in performing mitzvot or feeling awe of God, can lead to spiritual exile. When a person serves God without true love and reverence, their actions lose their sanctity and become "food" for impure forces. The Torah warns against this mindset by listing the names of the tribes, hinting at the dangers of pride in spiritual service. Instead, one should serve God with humility and sincerity, recognizing that all achievements come from Him. **END NOTE]**

**Siman #67**

**"And these are the names of the children of Israel who came, etc., each man and his household came."**

Behold, the beginning is awe (fear of Heaven), for without awe, wisdom is not considered at all (of value). And the purpose of wisdom is awe.

Even though one must serve the Blessed Creator with both love and awe, one should focus only on attaining awe, for love of the Creator, Blessed be He, will naturally rest upon them, as it is the way of a man to pursue, etc.

With this principle, a person can discern for themselves whether they possess complete awe.

We can understand this with a parable: If one (of the officers) stands before the king, and they place before him something that is, for him, the greatest of desires—something he would strongly crave if he were not standing before the king—nevertheless, while he stands before the king, his desire for that thing vanishes.

All this is because the shame and awe before the king are so great that he does not even perceive himself or his own traits, as they are entirely nullified in the face of his fear of the king.

As our sages, of blessed memory, said: "What are the righteous compared to in the presence of the Shechinah (Divine Presence)? Like a candle before a torch. Just as a lamp in daylight has no purpose and does not perform its function at all, so too their traits (i.e., inclinations or desires) do not have any effect in worldly desires, because they are always nullified in their existence out of fear of the Holy One, Blessed be He."

Behold, awe (fear of God) is the lower level of the King, for the King Himself has no awe. Rather, awe emanates from the King and rests upon His servants. Therefore, it is certain that awe is the King's lower level, and it serves as the connection between the

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King and the people. The awe that is bound to Him rests upon His servants, who are His people.

Even a great minister who possesses every good thing in his home, nevertheless, when he stands before the King, he becomes nullified in his existence, as mentioned earlier. This is the meaning of the verse: **"Fear the Lord, His holy ones, for those who fear Him lack nothing."** This means that even though they lack nothing, they are still nullified in their existence, along with all that they have, because of their awe of the Blessed Name.

The essence of kingship is awe, for the primary delight of the King in His sovereignty is that people fear Him, and as a result, they obey Him. Behold, God created the world so that people would fear Him. The primary purpose of creation was for this delight, and it is referred to as a **bride (kallah)**. We, His people, are obligated to always carry upon ourselves the awe of the Blessed Name.

This is why it is written that wherever Israel went into exile, the Divine Presence went with them, meaning that the delight in fearing the Creator is always with us. This is hinted at in the phrase **"I'kalosam"** (to destroy them), which can also be read as **"I'kallah"** (to the bride). This is like the saying: "The tannery's marketplace feels to him like the perfumer's marketplace," meaning that even in a lowly state, the delight of fear remains.

This is the meaning of **"And God saw the children of Israel"**—that He saw His delight, which is that they feared Him, as mentioned. This is why it says **"Elohim"**—which represents awe—and **"the children of Israel"**, meaning together with the children of Israel. Then, **"God knew"**, meaning He connected with that delight and took it to heart to redeem them.

This is the meaning of **"Each man and his household came."** Each person came with the awe of the Creator upon him. Awe is referred to as a **house**, as in the verse, **"With wisdom a house is built"** (Proverbs 24:3). The phrase **"Father establishes the daughter"** also reflects this idea, and therefore awe is called the "lower wisdom" (chokhmah tata'ah), which is likened to a house.

**[NOTE Summary:**

This passage emphasizes the centrality of awe (fear of God) in spiritual service. Awe is described as the foundation of wisdom and the ultimate connection between the King (God) and His people. It is the "lower level" of the King, emanating from Him and resting

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upon His servants. Even when people possess all worldly goods, standing in awe before God nullifies their desires and sense of self.

The parable of a person standing before a king illustrates this: just as the king's presence causes the person's greatest desires to fade, so too does the awe of God overshadow all personal inclinations. This awe is what binds people to God and allows them to fulfill His will. It is also described as the essence of God's kingship, as His delight in creation stems from being feared and obeyed by His subjects.

The exile of Israel is interpreted as carrying the Divine Presence with them, maintaining the delight of fearing God even in lowly states. The verse "Each man and his household came" signifies that each person brought the awe of God with them, likened to a "house," which serves as the foundation of divine service.

**Takeaway:**

Awe of God is the cornerstone of spiritual growth and connection. It nullifies personal ego and aligns a person with divine will. While love for God is essential, focusing on awe naturally leads to love and a deeper relationship with Him. Reflecting on God's greatness and one's own humility fosters this awe, serving as a constant foundation for all actions and mitzvot, even during challenging times. **END NOTE]**

**-The Rebbe, the Maggid of Mezeritch, shared with me a teaching that he heard from our teacher, the Baal Shem Tov:**

**Exodus 3:2-3:**

And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside now and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

The verse says: "An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the bush, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed" (Exodus 3:2-3). The Targum (Aramaic translation) explains: "And the angel of the Lord was revealed to him in a flame of fire from within the bush." The term "was revealed" (*ve'itgali*) refers to a revelation. The concept of revelation is that each person, according to their level, can receive the divine revelation. Revelation means that the divine manifestation can be perceived even in the lower levels. This is why the verse "And the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai" is translated in the Targum as "And the Lord was revealed on Mount Sinai," indicating that the word "descended" (*vayered*) means a form of revelation.

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In other verses, such as "Judah went down" (*vayered Yehuda*), the Targum translates it as "descended" (*venachat*), and similarly for "the boundary descended" (*vayered hagevul*), it translates as "descended" (*venachat techuma*). However, in the verse "I will go down now" (*ar'da na*), the Targum translates it as "I will be revealed." In this context, the term "descend" refers to the revelation of the giving of the Torah, where the revelation means that the divine manifestation can be received even in the lowest of levels. At the giving of the Torah, all individuals, from the highest level of Moses to the lowest among the people of Israel, received the revelation of the Torah. This is what the Targum means by saying that the angel of the Lord was revealed—it is a matter of divine revelation.

What is this revelation "in a flame of fire"? Rashi explains it as "a flame of fire, a heart of fire." Where does the messenger of G-d reveal himself? In the heart of fire. The heart of fire represents inner devotion, a sincere and intense passion, which is the meaning of the phrase "flashes of fire, the flame of G-d" (Song of Songs 8:6).

Where is this "flame of fire" located? From within the bush. Rashi comments: "Not from any other tree, because 'I am with him in distress' (Psalms 91:15)." The term "distress" (*tzara*) here refers to this world. This world is called "distress" because it is a narrow place, while the higher worlds, where the divine Infinite Light is in a revealed state in a broad space, but this world, where the Infinite Light is clothed in the ways of nature, is a narrow space, and that is why this world is called *tzarah* (distress). The higher purpose is that through the work of Torah study and the fulfillment of the commandments, one transforms *tzarah* into *tzohar* (light), illuminating the world with the light of Torah and mitzvot.

As it is written, "For man is like the tree of the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19). There are fruit-bearing trees, as Rabbi Yochanan says (Taanit 7a), which refer to Torah scholars, and there is the bush. The flame of fire is in the bush. Torah scholars who study Torah are compared to fire because Torah is likened to fire. But their fire is not "unconsumed," because Torah scholars quench their fire with new insights into the Torah that they generate. However, the bush, representing the simple people, within whom the flame of fire — the heart of fire — burns through their sincere and wholehearted prayers and recitations of *Tehillim* (Psalms), even though they do not fully understand the meaning of the words they say. Since their prayers come from simple faith, the flame of fire within them is "not consumed" and never extinguished. They have an unquenchable desire for G-dliness and Torah and mitzvot.

When Moses said, "I will turn aside now" (Exodus 3:3), Rashi explains it as "I will turn from here to approach there." Moses understood the higher vision being shown to him

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— the great value of the simple people compared to the Torah scholars, that the flame of fire is only in the bush. This led Moses to a level of *teshuvah* (repentance). Since Moses was a completely righteous person (*tzaddik gamur*), his form of *teshuvah* was different from the usual form of repentance. At Moses' birth, the Torah says, "And she saw that he was good, and the entire house was filled with light" (Sotah 12a), indicating that his form of repentance was unique. Moses' *teshuvah* was expressed in the words, "I will turn from here to approach there," meaning that one should never be content with their current spiritual state. Even a completely righteous person like Moses must engage in the process of *teshuvah* by turning from here to approach there, which is the movement of repentance.

[NOTE: The teaching, shared by the Maggid of Mezeritch, as heard from the Baal Shem Tov, interprets the famous biblical passage where Moses encounters the burning bush. The bush, which burns but is not consumed, symbolizes G-d's revelation even in the lowest levels of existence. This revelation is not limited to lofty spiritual realms but is accessible to all, including simple people, who may not fully understand Torah but whose prayers are sincere and filled with faith. The flame represents the intense, sincere devotion — a "heart of fire" that resides both in Torah scholars and the simple, faithful individuals.

Moses' turning aside to witness the burning bush reflects his recognition of the greatness of simple people, whose devotion, though less intellectual, is profound. The story also conveys the notion that even the most righteous person, like Moses, must always seek spiritual growth and not be content with their current state, which is expressed through the act of *teshuvah* (repentance).

**Life Lesson Takeaways:**

1. **Revelation is Accessible to All:** Divine revelation is not limited to spiritual elites. Each person, regardless of their spiritual level, can experience a connection with G-d. This reminds us that every individual has the capacity for meaningful spiritual experiences.
2. **Sincerity and Simplicity Matter:** The simple, heartfelt prayers of those who may not fully understand Torah can be just as powerful as the learned insights of scholars. This highlights the value of sincerity and faith over mere intellectual understanding, teaching that a genuine connection to G-d is not reserved for scholars alone.
3. **Life is Full of Narrowness (Tzarah), but We Can Transform It:** The physical world is considered a place of constraint or distress (*tzarah*), but through Torah study and mitzvot, we can turn this narrowness into light (*tzohar*). This

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encourages us to use our spiritual efforts to elevate our surroundings and bring light into the world.

4. **Constant Spiritual Growth:** Moses' realization that even a righteous person must always strive for higher spiritual levels teaches that no one should become complacent. Even the most elevated individuals must continually seek growth and engage in *teshuvah*, demonstrating the importance of always moving forward in one's spiritual journey.
5. **Honor the Contributions of Others:** The burning bush symbolizes the importance of recognizing the contributions of every individual, even those who might seem less knowledgeable or significant. Moses' recognition of the greatness in the simple people's devotion teaches us to respect and value everyone's role in the community, regardless of their scholarly accomplishments.

These lessons remind us of the importance of humility, sincerity, continuous growth, and the power of faith, no matter one's level of understanding. END NOTE]