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**Rabbi Chaim Aryeh Ginzberg Rediscovers the Beauty of Life**

**By Daniel Keren**



The second speaker in the January 1st Legal Holiday Hakhel Flatbush Yarchei Kallah Event was Rabbi Chaim Aryeh Zev Ginzberg, morah d’asra of the Chofetz Chaim Torah Center in Cedarhurst and internationally renowned Maggid Shiur and educator. He addressed the topic of “After Techias Hameisim Then What…Challenges of Life After (Near) Death” based on his own experiences of miraculously surviving a near fatal corona virus infection last year.

Rabbi Ginzberg began his dramatic presentation by declaring “I am not the same person who was [a featured speaker] in Hakhel events in past years. Now I only talk about the significance of life. I want to speak about what it means to wake up in the morning.”

**No Rational Explanation for the Rabbi’s Survival**

Last year when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, Rabbi Ginzberg became very ill and was in a hospital in Nassau County. This past year before Rosh Hashnah [after he had recovered and been released from the hospital], he asked one of the doctors [a frum gentleman] who had treated him if there was any explanation for his survival.

The doctor answered: “Rabbi in the Intensive Care Unit, there were 12 other people and you were one of the three worst cases. Yet, you were the only one who survived and left the ICU.” In other words, his survival had no natural rational explanation.

He told the Hakhel audience that just before Pesach, his condition had so deteriorated that his wife got a phone call from the hospital warning her that she had just a few hours to come and say goodbye to her husband as the hospital planned to pull out all of the plugs as they desperately needed the machine [a ventilator] to use for someone else who had more of a chance to survive.

**The Classic Question of Why Iyuv (Job) Was Punished**

Rabbi Ginzberg brought up the classic question of why Iyuv (Job) was punished so harshly with yissurim (bodily pains). In the Talmud it is recorded that when Paroh thought of drowning the male Jewish babies, he first asked for the opinions of the three great non-Jewish personalities of his generation – Bilaam, Yisro and Iyuv.

Bilaam urged Pharaoh to kill the Jewish male babies. Yisro demonstrated his disapproval of the plan and had to flee for his life. Iyuv seeing Paroh’s reaction to Yisro, merely remained silently.

Yisro was obviously rewarded by Hashem in that he became the father-in-law of Moshe and gave him valuable advice on how to judge the Jewish people, meriting a parsha in the Torah that was named in his honor.

Bilaam was punished by later being quickly killed by the Jews in the Midbar (wilderness) after giving Balak evil advice on how to harm the Jews by enticing the men to acts of immorality. That seems like an easy punishment when compared to the indescribable yissurim that Iyuv suffered for seemingly just remaining silent to Paroh’s question.

**The Precious Opportunity that Only Life Can Afford One**

The answer, Rabbi Ginzberg, explained is that even though Iyuv was in such terrible and unremitting pain, he was still nevertheless still alive and there is still a great benefit and brocha (blessing) for the precious opportunities that only life can allow a person, especially with regards to serving Hashem.

Rabbi Ginzberg recalled the more recent story of the late Rabbi Shimon Schwab who towards the end of his life lost the use of his legs and was confined to a wheelchair. One of his grandsons who hadn’t seen in him in three years was shocked and greatly saddened to see his zeidie so constricted. He asked his grandfather how he was able to be so cheerful and accept this new limitation in his life.

Rabbi Schwab explained by way of a moshul (parable.) Imagine that a rich man offers you an interest free loan of a million dollars but with a condition that you repay it when he asks. Many, many years pass and the rich man never calls in his loan. Than one year he calls and say ask if you remember the million dollar loan he gave you. You say yes and ask if he wants the million dollars back. He says, that he just wants you to give him back a thousand dollars and you can keep the rest of loan forever.

Rabbi Schwab explained that everything in life is like an interest free loan from Hashem and if one is blessed with a beautiful family, including children and grandchildren who follow in the derech Hashem and one has been able to lead a productive life, then if towards the end of one’s life, a person loses the ability to walk, it is like the rich man forgiving most of his loan to a man.

**The Story of Two Jewish Brothers – Nathan & Isidore Straus**

Rabbi Ginzberg recalled recently reading a magazine article about the Israeli city of Netanya. The story goes back almost 108 years ago to when two Jewish brothers – Nathan and Isidore Straus (owners of Macy’s Department Store and Abraham & Straus Department Store) decided to take a six-month vacation with their wives touring through Europe.

During their trip to all of the classical sites of Europe, someone asked them if they intended to visit Palestine where many Jews were beginning to create new communities. It wasn’t on their itinerary, but both brothers thought it would be nice to spend a week in the Holy Land that was rich with Jewish history.

During that week, the brothers and their wives travelled to different communities and generously donated to institutions that would help their Jewish brethren. However at the end of the week, Isidore was anxious to resume his European tour. However Nathan wanted to see more of the Jewish settlements and help them with philanthropic donations.

Because of that he missed joining his brother and sister-in-law on travelling on a special ship making her maiden journey towards America. That ship was the RMS Titanic. One of Nathan’s donations while in Palestine was to helping a fledgling Jewish settlement being created on the Mediterranean Sea. And they honored his donation by naming their community in his honor – Natanya.

**The Importance of Just One Small Decision**

Rabbi Ginzberg noted that was just one small decision. Should we go or should we stay for a few more weeks? The result was that one brother perished and one survived. Nathan who lived another 19 years spent the rest of his life devoting himself to giving philanthropic donations to Jewish causes in behalf of the memory of his brother and sister-in-law.

Regarding his own personal saga of survival, Rabbi Ginzberg recalled that after returning home after spending six and a half weeks in the hospital, including three weeks on the ventilator, he heard the sound of rain drops hitting the windows of his bedroom. At that very moment he felt so overwhelmed with the sensation that Hashem was lovingly talking to him.

Rabbi Ginzberg recalled talking to Rabbi [Elazar Menachem Man] Shach towards the end of his long life had difficulty in hearing and seeing and no longer had the sense of taste when eating his food. But despite those physical limitations, the world renowned Ponevezh Rosh Hayeshiva declared that his sense of emunah (belief) in Hashem had never been greater.

To go through life, Rabbi Ginzberg said, a person’s mission is to despite all the difficulties grasp every opportunity to come closer and better serve Hakodesh Baruch Hu.

*Reprinted from the January 3, 2021 edition of The Jewish Connection*

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*And I appeared* (va'eira) (Exodus 6:3)

The word "va'eira" is in both the past and present tense, indicating that the revelation of G-dliness that existed in the times of our forefathers continues to exist today as well.

Every Jew possesses the quality of Abraham (love of G-d), the quality of Isaac (awe of G-d), and the quality of Jacob (mercy); the revelation of these inner traits is akin to G-d's revelation to the Patriarchs. *(Ohr HaTorah)*

Why does Rashi comment that G-d appeared "to the Patriarchs"? To teach us that G-d revealed Himself to them not because of their great virtue, but solely because they were the fathers of the Jewish people, and would thus pass on everything they received to their descendants forever. *(Likutei Sichos)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayechi 5756 edition of the L’Chaim Weekly*

# Rav Avigdor Miller on Loving Hashem and Your Fellow



**QUESTION:**We have an obligation to love Hashem and to love our fellow Jews. Whom do we have to love more, G-d or man?

**ANSWER**: You have to love Hakodosh Boruch Hu with all your heart and that leaves no space for any competition. Only that Hakodosh Boruch Hu says that you have to obey Him and you have to love your fellow Jews. And by doing that you are loving Hashem.

Part of loving Hashem is loving your fellow Jew. If a person however forgets about Hashem and he thinks he’ll concentrate with all his heart on loving his fellow man, that man is wasting his life. Now, it’s a great thing to love your fellow man – but that’s only if you do it in the service of Hashem. If you do it because you love Hashem, then you’re living successfully.

**You Have to Love Hashem with All Your Heart**

And therefore there’s no question about the answer: You have to love Hashem with all your heart, and that means that there’s no room for anything else. The Chofetz Chaim we are told was a very kindly man. He went out of his way to help people. But he wasn’t exceptional in inviting people to his home.

He used to help people find places to stay. He used to pay money to support them when they were visiting in his town. He paid for their lodging, for their food. But to take people into his home, he didn’t overdo that – he wasn’t so generous. And somebody explained that this was because he didn’t want to divide his loyalties to Hashem. He couldn’t be a crony; he couldn’t sit around all evening talking with his guests. He used to spend his time studying the Torah or even in solitude with Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

**Was Available for All those in Need**

He was a man who was in love with Hashem, he so couldn’t share his time freely with other people. And so although his heart was in *gemilas chasodim –*he was instrumental in founding free lone societies everywhere. He was busy helping poor brides, poor *yeshiva* men. He gave advice to everyone; he was available for all those in need. He did all the good deeds that you can imagine.

But he did it all because he loved Hashem. And that’s why he didn’t spend more time than was needed with other people; if he could avoid being a crony and hanging around together with people he did that. Because it detracted from his loyalty, his allegiance, and his clinging to Hashem. And בכל לבבך means with all your heart, with no divided loyalties.

*Reprinted from an email of Toras Avigdor. - TAPE # 555*

**Thoughts that Count**

**For Parshat Vaeira**

*And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob... I have also heard the groaning of the Children of Israel* (Exodus 6:3-5)

Moses was concerned that after 210 years of slavery in Egypt the Jewish people would have grown too accustomed to the exile to fully absorb the message that their redemption was imminent.

G-d's answer about our Patriarchs thus reassured him that his worries were unwarranted; the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can never accustom themselves to exile, for to them it is an unnatural state. Every day that passes is as bitter as the very first. The same is true for us today.

Despite the fact that this present exile has lasted more than 1900 years, the Jewish people is more than ready to accept the message that the Final Redemption is indeed imminent. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbat Parshat Shemot, 5751)*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Vaeira 5781**



 The Mishne in Avot questions why the world was created, so to speak, by ten statements and utterances from Heaven. It explains that this shows the importance of life on this planet, and of the infinite universe itself, that it was lovingly created, when one statement alone would have been sufficient. The repetition of the statements of creation were a sign of affection between the Creator and the created, and it illustrates the complexity and eternal importance of the human condition in the infinite universe in which we live.

**Why So Many Plagues?**

I think the same type of message is communicated to us in the Torah reading of this week. We are told of plague after plague that was visited upon the Egyptians, to force them to free the people of Israel from bondage and slavery. Why so many plagues?

The L-rd could certainly have accomplished the same result with one plague, especially the last and final plague of the death of the Egyptian firstborn. Why go through the exercise of the first nine plagues that apparently were unsuccessful in achieving the desired goal of Jewish freedom, when one major blow apparently would have been sufficient to achieve the emancipation of the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage?

One can easily say in response to this question that it was the cumulative effect of all the plagues that brought about the decision by Pharaoh and the Egyptians to free the Jewish slaves. Nevertheless, from a literal reading of the Torah text itself there is little proof that we are speaking about a cumulative effect, but rather the one, main blow – death of the firstborn Egyptians – that brought about Jewish freedom and the Exodus from Egypt.

**The Importance of a Hard-Won Victory**

A hard-won victory is more meaningful than an easy instantaneous triumph of success. A process that requires patience, with the ability to absorb disappointments and frustrations, all on the road to ultimate success, is something that is enormously valuable and lasting. It is not only the Egyptians that have to experience the process of the ten plagues visited upon them, but it is also the Jewish slaves that must experience the frustration and disappointment that each plague brought with it.

It is obvious from the Torah that Moshe expected a quick victory, and, that he had a feeling of resentment and had complaints that things apparently became worse and not better when he embarked on his mission to free the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. The L-rd reminds him of the behavior of the founders of the Jewish people Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who exhibited patience and fortitude, in their ultimate triumph in creating the Jewish people. This had a lasting and eternal quality to it. Easy victories are usually squandered away.

**More Powerful than Just One Statement**

The universe that was created with ten utterances has much more meaning than one created with one statement. An Exodus and emancipation achieved by a process of plagues, of ups and downs of emotion and faith, of challenges and tenacity, remains an eternal guide for all generations of the Jewish people.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vaeira 5756 edition of the L’Chaim Weekly, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization.*

**The Mission of a Jew to Overcome “Coldness” and Bring Holiness to the World**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



The first plague visited upon Egypt by G-d, as related in this week's Torah portion, Va'eira, was the plague of blood. Not just the waters of the Nile, but every drop of water in the country was miraculously transformed. The only exception was the water which was used by the Jewish people.

Water, by nature, is cold -- the exact opposite of holiness.

Holiness is vibrant and warm, infusing vitality and life in all with which it comes in contact.

The first obstacle a Jew must overcome in his daily life is conquering this coldness -- the apathy and indifference towards holiness that is the source of all evil -- and replacing it with a warmth and passion for G-d and for Yiddishkeit. It is for this reason that the plague of blood was the first step in the redemptive process of the Jewish people from Egypt.

The second plague was the plague of frogs.

The cold-blooded creatures left their natural habitat and swarmed across the Egyptian countryside, filling the Egyptians' homes and crawling into their ovens.

A Jew's enthusiasm and warmth is supposed to be reserved for holiness, as opposed to the pleasures of the physical world.

**The Lesson of the Frogs**

When the frogs overcame their natural inclination for damp and cold, and jumped en masse into Pharaoh's ovens, they demonstrated the need for us to work on ourselves to overcome the lusts and appetites for physical indulgence.

Thus the first two plagues represent our two-pronged approach toward the service of G-d: "avoiding that which is evil" and "doing good."

The usual order of service is to first shun doing that which is bad, and afterward striving to perform positive deeds.

An analogy may be found in the preparation of a suitable dwelling place for a king: the first step involves thoroughly cleaning the house and making sure it is free of dirt ("avoid evil"), after which the living quarters may be decorated and filled with beautiful furnishings, as befits the king ("do good").

**Why a House Must be Scrubbe Spic and Span**

If the house is not scrubbed spic and span, the beautiful furnishings will look out of place and do little to disguise the underlying uncleanliness.

Sometimes, however, the proper order is the reverse, as expressed in the saying of the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel: "The world says that when one cannot go under an obstacle, the proper course of action is to jump over. And I say, one must always jump over."

For when a Jew brings warmth and holiness into his surroundings, the coldness and apathy is automatically dispelled.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayechi 5756 edition of the L’Chaim Weekly, a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. Adapted from Sefer HaSichot of the Rebbe, Vol 1.*

**The Crown of a Good Name**

**By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**



As we start the second chumash of Sefer Shmos, we study the painful birth of the Jewish people. The Torah introduces this saga with the preface, “V’eila shmos bnei Yisroel – These are the names of the children of Israel.” Why does the story of our nation begin with the subject of names? The simple answer is because one of the reasons why we were saved from Egypt is because we didn’t change our Jewish names.

But that is only scratching the surface. When we dig deeper, we will realize it is because in our belief a name foretells each person’s destiny. The Gemora teaches us, shma garim, a name actually generates our future.

**No Longer the First Born**

So, for example, the name Reuven, which has a gematria of 259, is the exact numerical value for the words, “Lo bechor – He is not the firstborn,” for although he was chronologically firstborn, Yaakov stripped him of the firstborn rights of monarchy and priesthood because he was hasty and rash.

Similarly, the name Yosef, which as Rochel explained, alludes to “Asaf Elokim es cherpasi – Hashem gathered in my shame,” is a clear crystal ball of Yosef’s future. The shame of being sold as a slave was wiped out when he became viceroy and the shame of being accused of adultery with the wife of Potifar was removed when Potifar gave him his adopted daughter Asnas to marry.

In this week’s parsha, the name of the daughter of Paroh known as Basya (but more correctly pronounced Bisya) has the same letters as the word teiva (tof, yud, beis, and hei), the small box that she retrieved when she took Moshe Rabbeinu out of the Nile. Even the name Moshe has the same letters as Hashem, for he would see Hashem face to face like no other.

But there is another reason why the introduction to the Jewish people starts out with the subject of a name. It is because of our belief that there is nothing more important in life than maintaining a good name among people. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos teaches us that there are three crowns: the crown of royalty, the crown of the priesthood, and the crown of Torah.

**The Most Important Crown of All**

Then, the Mishna surprises us, saying that there is yet a crown that towers above all three. You’re probably shocked. What can be more than the crown of Torah? After all, we are taught, “Talmud Torah kneged kulom – The study of Torah is equal to all else.”

The Mishna teaches us that there is yet an acquisition of even more supreme importance and that is the acquisition of the crown of a good name, the keser shem tov. We must remember that as important as Torah is, the Gemora explains, “Gadol hatalmud she’hatalmud meviah liyedei maisah – Great is learning because learning leads us to correct action.”

The crown of a good name comes from the fruition of absorbing Torah ideals. It comes from being conscious of the Torah’s mission to be above suspicion, as it says, “V’heyisem niki’im meiHashem u’meiYisroel,” you should be clean in the Eyes of Hashem and in the eyes of your fellow Jew.” It comes from living Torah values such as, “Lo sonu ish es amiso,” not to say hurtful words to your fellow man. “Lo sikom,” not to take revenge, and “Lo sitor,” not to bear a grudge. It comes when we walk the talk of “V’asisa hayosher v’hatov,” doing what is upright and good.

**The Importance of Loving Your Fellow as Yourself**

The good name comes from embracing “V’ahavta l’rei’acha k’mocha,” loving your fellow as yourself, especially in the vital relationship between spouses, and it comes from living the ideal of, “Lo sisna es achicha bilvavecha,” not hating one’s follow man in one’s heart. It comes from avoiding at all costs lashon hara, evil gossip, and rechilus, gossip mongering. It comes from being truthful, loyal, trustworthy, and not revealing people’s secrets.

May we live up to the potential hidden in our names and may we zealously guard the crown of our good names and in that merit may Hashem bless us with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

*Reprinted from the January 5, 2021 email of The Jewish Vues.*

**Parshas Beshalich**

**The Merit of**

**Trusting HASHEM**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



*And HASHEM said to Moshe, “Why shout at Me? Speak to the Jewish People and they should cross*. Shemos 14:15

After months of witnessing the hand of HASHEM, the entire Jewish nation — three million strong — marched out from slavery to freedom with flourish and fanfare.

Escorted by clouds of glory, walking through a desert made smooth by overt miracles, they travelled as one. It seemed that the troubles of the Jewish people were finally behind them, and they were being escorted to their final redemption ... until the clouds directed them to a dead end – the sea. Stopping there, the Jewish people looked up and saw Mitzraim chasing after them. With nowhere to turn, they waited while Moshe called out to HASHEM. HASHEM answered back, “Moshe, why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Jewish people and let them travel.” At that point, the entire nation crossed the Yam Suf.

Rashi is bothered by the expression that HASHEM used: “the Jews need only travel.” What did HASHEM mean by that? How could they travel when an entire sea was in the way? Rashi explains that HASHEM was saying there is nothing that will stop the Klal Yisroel because they are worthy of the greatest miracles ever known to man. Rashi then enumerates the reasons that they are so worthy. 1. The merit of the Avos. 2. Their own merit. 3. The merit of the trust that they had in HASHEM at that moment.

**How is Trusting in HASHEM a Merit Equal to the Avos?**

The difficulty with this Rashi is that he lists all three reasons in same breath as if they are equal, and clearly they aren’t. The first two, the merit of the Avos and the Jews’ own merit, refer to overall perfection across the gamut of human activity. The Avos were living, breathing Sifrei Torah.

We learn from their every action and thought. Their combined merit is hard to imagine. And even the second cause, the merit of the entire Jewish people, was stupendous. While not every member had remained on the highest level, as a nation they had remained loyal to HASHEM. After spending months witnessing HASHEM’s direct involvement in their lives, they had grown to great levels across many different areas: chessed, emunah, ahavas Yisroel, emes… How can we compare one single aspect — their trust in HASHEM — to the merit of the Avos or to the merit of all of their actions put together? It would seem to be dwarfed by comparison. Yet Rashi put these together as if they are all equal reasons that HASHEM would create miracles for the Jewish people.

**HASHEM’s Involvement in the World**

The answer to this question is based on understanding HASHEM’s relationship to this world. The Chovos Ha’Levovos explains that because HASHEM created this world, HASHEM feels a responsibility, if it could be, to sustain it. Much like if I invite you to my home, it is my obligation as host to take care of your needs, so too HASHEM feels almost obliged to support all of His creations. However, there are different levels to HASHEM’s direct involvement in the running of this world, what the sefer Derech Hashem calls “hashgacha klalis” and “hashgacha pratis.”

Hashgacha klalis, or **general intervention**, refers to HASHEM’s involvement in the “big picture” issues: famine, war, epidemics, natural catastrophes, and maintaining the multitude of systems that allow for life as we know it. It is a given that HASHEM is constantly and permanently involved in the running of this world at that level. However, the specific details and the day-to-day running of the world HASHEM has given over to a host of forces that He created and maintains, but allows to actually carry out the laws that He set. These forces determine much of the outcomes that befall humanity.

Hashgacha Pratis, or **personal intervention,** is very different. This refers to HASHEM’s personal involvement in a nation’s or a person’s life. It includes HASHEM actually supervising directly, watching over and taking care of the needs of those individuals.

General intervention is a given; it is something that HASHEM assures to all of creation as a birthright. Personal intervention is quite different; it must be earned. By dint of being the children of the Avos, the Jewish nation merits personal intervention — provided they keep certain conditions. One of these is that they must recognize Who runs the world. In this regard, it functions on a continuum.

The more a person trusts in HASHEM, the more, if it could be, HASHEM feels an obligation to take care of that person, and the more HASHEM will be directly involved in that person’s life. It is almost as if HASHEM says, “How can I not take care of him, he relies on Me, he trusts in Me.

This seems to be the answer as to why the “merit of their belief in HASHEM” was so pivotal at Krias Yam Suf. In terms of the objective weight, there is no comparison between the merits of the Avos and their current trust in HASHEM, but trust in HASHEM operates on a different level. It alone can be the reason that HASHEM will save a people. It was almost like HASHEM was saying, “How can I not take care of them? They trust in Me. They rely on Me. I have to save them.” And that trust alone was reason enough to split the sea.

**The Reward for Trust – HASHEM Takes Care of Us**

This is a powerful lesson to us in the effect of trusting in HASHEM. While we are obligated to act in the ways of this world, we are equally obligated to trust in HASHEM. We have to go out and do our part, follow the laws of nature, knowing all the while that exactly that which HASHEM has decreed will come about — no more, no less, no sooner, no later.

However, the amount of our trust in HASHEM will directly affect how much HASHEM will intercede on our behalf, and this may have a huge difference in many situations. For example, there may be times when we don’t warrant receiving that which we need.

Whether its health, success, or sustenance, it may well be that according to the letter of the law, we don’t special assistance, and certainly not the right to ask HASHEM to intervene on our behalf. In that situation, it may be our trust in HASHEM alone that will bring us HASHEM’s help. When we rely on HASHEM and trust in Him, HASHEM, if it could be, thereby feels almost obligated to take care of us.

Trust in HASHEM is the basis of our belief system. It is also one of the most comforting thoughts that a human can come to. And it is also one of the most effective ways for us to secure HASHEM’s direct involvement in our lives — even in a manner that we might not otherwise deserve.

*Reprinted from the website of Theshmuz.com.*

**Why Is Alexander**

**A Jewish Name?**

**By**[**Yehuda Shurpin**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15169/jewish/Shurpin-Yehuda.htm)



**A detail from a floor mosaic originally from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, showing Alexander the Great battling Darius III of Persia.**

Throughout history, Jews have been careful to retain their distinctly Jewish names. In fact, our sages tell us that although more than two centuries of exile and slavery in Egypt had all but assimilated the Children of Israel into the idolatrous society of Egypt, one of the reasons why they merited their miraculous redemption was that they retained their Jewish names.[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a4992830');)

Traditionally, Jewish names are Hebrew, Yiddish or Ladino. Some other names that have crept in over the years and have become accepted as Jewish names are actually [translations of Jewish names in foreign languages](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4300899/jewish/8-Yiddish-Names-Actually-From-Greek-and-Latin.htm).

The name Alexander, however, is unique. It originates from the Greek king Alexander the Great, ruler of Macedonia, who established the largest empire the ancient world had ever seen. In other words, its origin is definitely not Jewish.

Another difference: When names of non-Hebrew origin are written in Hebrew documents, such as a bill of divorce, there is a specific style of spelling used. Alexander, however, is spelled according to the Hebrew rules.[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a4992830');)

How did Alexander gain such a special place in Jewish nomenclature?

**Simeon the Just and Alexander the Great**

The following is recorded in the Talmud[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a4992830');) and Megillat Ta’anit:[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a4992830');)

On the 21st Kislev[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a4992830');) of the year 3448 from creation (313 BCE), after Alexander the Great brought an end to Persian rule and marched through the Land of Israel, the Kutheans, bitter enemies of the Jewish people, convinced Alexander that the Jews rebelled against his sovereignty and that their Holy Temple in Jerusalem should be destroyed.

Alexander marched on toward Jerusalem at the head of his army. Hearing of this, Shimon HaTzaddik (Simeon the Just), who was then the [Kohen Gadol](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4195084/jewish/The-High-Priest-in-Jewish-Tradition.htm) (High Priest) and one of the last remnants of the Men of the Great Assembly, donned the priestly vestments and went to greet Alexander, along with a delegation of Jewish dignitaries bearing torches.

**The Two Groups Met**

The two groups walked toward each other all night. When dawn arrived, Alexander asked the Kutheans, “Who are these people coming to meet us?”

They said to him, “These are the Jews, who have rebelled against you!”

The two camps met each other at Antipatris. When Alexander saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he descended from his chariot and bowed before him.

“Should a great king such as yourself bow to this Jew?” asked the members of his entourage.

“I do this,” he replied, “because the image of this man’s face appears before me and leads me to victory when I am on the battlefields.”

Alexander then asked the representatives of the Jewish people why they had come to him.

“Is it possible,” they replied, “that gentiles will try to mislead you into destroying the Temple, in which we pray for you and that your kingdom not be destroyed, and we should remain silent and not tell you!?”

“Who are these people who want to destroy it?” asked Alexander.

“They are these very Kutheans who stand before you,” replied the Jews.

“If so,” said the king, “they are given into your hands to deal with as you please.”

The Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, plowing the area and sowing it with leeks (as a sign of complete destruction), just as they sought to do to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

The description of this encounter in traditional Jewish sources stops here. However, In the Sefer Yosippon,[6](javascript:doFootnote('6a4992830');) another crucial part of the story is added:

**The Eternal Reward of Alexander’s Kindness**

Shimon HaTzaddik then took Alexander the Great on a tour of the Holy Temple. Alexander, impressed, wished to donate gold to have an image of himself placed in the Holy Temple so that he would be immortalized. Shimon demurred, saying that it was forbidden for the Jews to have graven images, and certainly not in the Temple. He suggested that he instead give the gold to the poor. And as for memorializing the occasion, Shimon suggested an even better way: all male *kohanim* born that year would be named “Alexander.”

Alexander liked the idea, and the Jews, who were very thankful to Alexander for all that he did for them, including sparing the Holy Temple from destruction, gratefully named their children after him. Thus, the name Alexander forever became a Jewish name.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4992830/jewish/Why-Is-Alexander-a-Jewish-Name.htm" \l "footnoteRef1a4992830) See Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 32.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4992830/jewish/Why-Is-Alexander-a-Jewish-Name.htm" \l "footnoteRef2a4992830) *Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim*, vol. 4:66 & vol. 5:10.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4992830/jewish/Why-Is-Alexander-a-Jewish-Name.htm" \l "footnoteRef3a4992830) Talmud, Yoma 69a.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4992830/jewish/Why-Is-Alexander-a-Jewish-Name.htm" \l "footnoteRef4a4992830) Megillat Ta’anit, ch. 9.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4992830/jewish/Why-Is-Alexander-a-Jewish-Name.htm" \l "footnoteRef5a4992830) This follows the date in Megillat Taanit. The Talmud records it as 25 Tevet.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4992830/jewish/Why-Is-Alexander-a-Jewish-Name.htm" \l "footnoteRef6a4992830) *Sefer Yosippon*, ch. 10. (Not to be confused with Josephus. There is much discussion about the authorship of Yosippon and whether it is, in fact, Josephus. However, that is beyond the scope of our discussion.) In*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 11:8, Josephus mentions Alexander’s visit to the Temple, but does not mention the part about the priests being named after him.

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