Jewish Tribune – Shemos

**Moshe the Survivor**

The Medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 1,3) tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu had ten names. Some of them are very familiar to us: Yekutiel, Avigdor, Tuvia amongst others.

Yet, the name that was used in his lifetime and he was known by, and the name that generations of Klal Yisroel use with reverence and veneration, is Moshe.

Why did this name stick? Of all the beautiful names that Moshe had, why is this one used for posterity?

The Seforno explains that the reason the name Moshe is used is because it would be a constant reminder to him that he is a survivor.

The possuk (Shemos 2,10) tells us that Basya called him Moshe, כִּי מִן הַמַּיִם מְשִׁיתִהוּ, because she drew him from the water.

There he was, a small three-month old baby, floating in a basket in the river Nile. He was saved from this precarious situation and would have a reminder of this every time his name was mentioned.

Survivors look at the world differently. People who survive a plane crash or any near-death experience often feel they were spared for a reason. They are driven with a certain sense of mission.

Rabbi Berel Wein tells of the time he first visited the children’s memorial in Yad Vashem. The memorial is hollowed out from an underground cavern, built as a tribute to the approximately 1.5 million Jewish children who were murdered during the Holocaust.

The Children's Memorial was designed by architect Moshe Safdie and built with the generous donation of Abe and Edita Spiegel, whose son Uziel was murdered in Auschwitz at the age of two and a half.

Rabbi Wein describes the darkness as you first enter. It takes a moment or two for eyes to re-adjust from the bright Jerusalem sunlight.

And then you see a single memorial candle, placed in the middle of the cavern. Through dozens of carefully placed mirrors, the light of the candle is reflected in a dark and somber space, creating the impression of millions of stars shining in the firmament.

And then, just as your eyes have acclimatised to the darkness, you hear the names. Names of murdered children, their ages and hometown can be heard in the background. Yitzi Rosenberg, three years old, Lodz. Malka Levy, six years old, Warsaw. Yonah Weisz, four years old, Krakow.

And the names go on and on. As Rabbi Wein puts it, until you can’t take it anymore. And you exit back out, into the bright Jerusalem sunlight.

Rabbi Wein moved by his experience realised that he heard lots of names, but he didn’t hear his name. He was of the age. He too was a child in the war years. But he didn’t hear his name.

And to some extent, if one third of your people are killed, we are all survivors. Whether our parents, grandparents or great grandparents made it to these shores, we are survivors and have been spared for a reason.

On another occasion, I heard Rabbi Wein describe a childhood memory which made a profound impact on him, and by extension on us too. He remembers his father taking him to Chicago’s Midway Airport to greet Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog, the chief rabbi of Palestine after the Second World War.

Rabbi Wein remembers him emerging from the plane and walking down the stairs in his shiny top hat, holding his cane in one hand and a *Tanach* in the other. With his silver beard and aristocratic demeanor, he was a majestic presence.

After delivering a shiur in Yiddish in the yeshiva, Rabbi Herzog then addressed the vast gathering in English.

“How are you going to help rebuild the Jewish People?” he asked.

Rabbi Herzog relayed that he had been to the Vatican and had asked Pope Pius XII to return the thousands of Jewish children entrusted to Catholic institutions in Europe by parents hoping to save them from annihilation at the hands of the Germans. The pope had flatly refused. Overcome with emotion, the rabbi put his head down on the lectern and wept bitterly. Rabbi Wein described the shock, as the enormity of the Jewish tragedy of World War II began sinking in.

Then Rabbi Herzog defiantly raised his head and looked at the young men gathered before him. “I cannot save those thousands of Jewish children,” he declared, “but I ask of you – how are you going to help [rebuild the Jewish People](http://www.aish.com/jl/h/dv/Rebuilding-the-Community-Miracle-of-Israel-4.html)?”

Afterward, everyone filed passed him to shake his hand and receive his blessing, he looked at the young Rabbi Wein, who was not yet bar mitzva, and repeated: “Did you understand what I said to you? Don’t forget it.”

Rabbi Wein reflected that all his life, Rabbi Herzog’s words have echoed in his ears and soul, spurring him on to contribute so much to Klal Yisroel.

That is why the name Moshe is used throughout the Torah and throughout history. To remind him that he was a survivor and was spared because he had a mission to fulfil. And to remind us of the same.

**Rabbi Golker is the** **Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**