Dvar Torah – Sh'mot – Discovering Your Real Name
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Based on a Torah Commentaries by Rabbi Laura Geller

- Our tradition teaches that each of us has three names: the one we are given at birth, the one we are called, and our real name. The task of each person, according to the tradition, is to discover our real name.

- This Week's Torah Portion is Sh'mot = Names
    - The parsha and the book contain hundreds of names

- "These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob . . . Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah . . . " (Exodus 1:1)—the list goes on. "The total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue came to seventy . . . Joseph died, and all his brothers and that generation . . ." (1:5–6).
    - One commentary suggests that the reason we were redeemed from slavery in Egypt was that we kept our Hebrew names, never forgot who we were.

- What is a Hebrew name it is the name our parents give us and the name of our parents, it is a reminder of where we come from and what we are intended to become.

- But the main character in the Torah Portion, Moses is born at first to nameless people and his own name is not Jewish, but Egyptian.
    - A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a woman of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him . . . put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile . . . . " (Exodus 2:1–4)
    - Pharaoh's daughter takes him from the basket, from the Nile and names him Moshe, meaning "to draw out".
    - But is that his real name? How can we know he must have been named by his parents but that name was lost when they sent him down the Nile. According to the midrash Moshe is not the name he was given at birth, but the second the name the one he is called by others, in this case Pharaoh's daughter

and later all of Egypt. But what will be his real name?

- Moses will spend his life trying to discover it. Names are important to Moses, when he meets God for the first time at the burning bush he asks him, "What is your name?" When I tell the Israelites about you what should I tell them to call you. God responds:
    - "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh, thus shall you say to the Israelites: 'Ehyeh sent me to you.' " And God said further to Moses, "Thus you shall speak to the Israelites: 'The Eternal, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob—has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, this is how I shall be called for eternity.'" (Exodus 3:13–15)
    - Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh = I will be what I will be. Or more poetically, I am in the process of becoming what I will become.
    - God's name for God's self is Moses' name for himself, it is our name for ourselves.
    - God is not a name at all; it yields nothing constant, nothing knowable through all vicissitudes. It is contingent, the very figure of human desire—a fluid dynamic name, it expresses the First Person form of God's name, addressing the human, involved in dialogue with the human. It changes constantly as humans beings find and lose relationship with God." (Aviva Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*; [New York: Doubleday, 2001], p.74)
- We are not only who our parents called us to be, and we are not only the people others see us and call us as; we are becoming. Our real name lies in a combination of the two. Our past and our present – shape our future.
- Moses becomes a fuller version of his name, rather than "to draw out" Moses becomes the one who draws out, not passive but active, be draws the Israelites out of Egypt. His parents wanted him to survive so they hid him, Pharoah's daughter saw him as one that needed to be taken out and cared for. Moses came to embody both those desires and took the Israelites out of Egypt so they could survive, he drew them out of their own rudderless journey down the river of slavery to the dry land of redemption. Moses could only do this with God's help, with God's name, he became what they needed him to become.
- Each of us has three names: the one we are given at birth, the one we are called, and our real name. We discover our real name when we connect God's name to our lives. When we become what our family, our community and our own soul needs us to become. When

we discover what we are needed to be, what out calling and our purpose is.