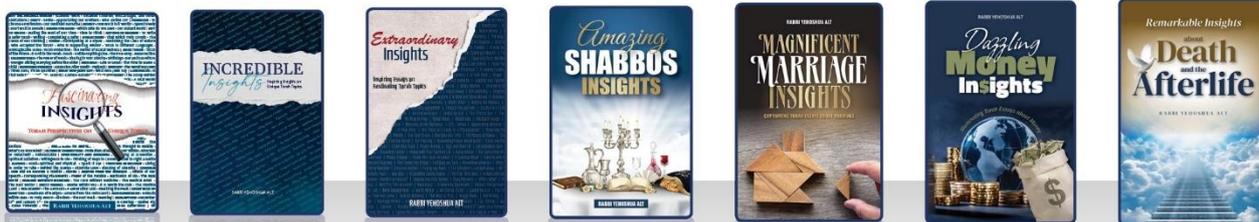


Fascinating INSIGHTS

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לעילוי נשמת הירש בן שלמה
ומנחם מענדיל בן יוסף מאיר

Aisle in the Domicile

Taking a look at some sefarim, we see how the cleaning for Pesach impacted the learning of gedolim.

The Mordechai¹ (c. 1250-1298) cites the words of Rabbeinu Meir: "... on Erev Pesach where we are so busy getting rid of the Chametz from all sides, I turned away from all that I was busy with to answer your question, in an abridged way..."



In a letter the Chassam Sofer² (1762-1839) wrote to a Dayan he concludes, "Since I am outside my learning room because the righteous women are cleaning for Pesach, I am not able to be as lengthy as needed."

The Noda B'Yehuda³ (1713-1793) wrote, "In these days of Nissan, I am so busy with the tzibur teaching them Hilchos Pesach. Additionally, I don't have an empty place and I am walking from room to room and corner to corner since we are cleaning for Pesach. Therefore I will respond in short..."

Last Names

For thousands of years, most Jews were called by their first name, then *Ben* ("son of") for a male, or *Bas* ("daughter of") for a female, plus the name of their father or mother. Jews are still referred to this way when they receive an *aliya* in shul, at weddings and when prayed for. After the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, Jewish last names started to become more widespread. Some wanted to recall the places their families had left. As family names became more popular across Europe in general, more and more Jews began to adopt them, often choosing names that referred to local landmarks or places. This process accelerated under the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Joseph II, who ruled much of Europe from 1765–1790 and forced all his subjects to adopt German surnames.

Here are some telling facts from Jewish last names. For example, כֵּן is an acronym for כֹּהֵן צַדִּיק ("righteous priest"). Another common surname for a Kohen family is Kopshitz: *Kop* in Yiddish means "head" and *shitz* refers to the *tzitz* worn upon the Kohen Gadol's head.

The last name סמט, *Samet* is short for סוּר מְרַע וְעֵשָׂה, *Sor Mer'ei V'Eshe*.⁴ The family name בל, *Ball*, stands for בֵּן לֵוִי while the name אַמְבֵּשׁ, *Ambush*, is an acronym for אַנִּי מְאַמֵּן בְּאַמוּנָה, *Ani M'amen B'Amuna*, *שלמה*.

The Maharam Shik (1807–1879) remarked that he had a tradition that when his family left the dominion of

¹ Baba Kamma, Remez 55.

² Shu"t Chassam Sofer, Orach Chaim, 1:136.

³ Mahadura Tinyana, Orach Chaim, 57.

⁴ Tehillim 34:15.

the king of Estreich (Austria), they had to assume a family name. Since the family head was concerned about the problem with using a secular name (which the *Kadmonim* say), he chose as his family name the name שיק, as it is an acronym for the phrase שם ישראל קודש ("Jewish names are holy").

Here are some other telling facts from Jewish family names. The last name גץ, Getz is an acronym for גבאי צדקה while מץ, Metz is short for מורה צדק. And the name זקהם, Zakheim is an acronym for זרע קודש המה while the name ישר (Yashar) stands for יהיה שנים רבות.⁵

Here is another interesting fact about Jewish last names: "-witz" is a German variation on a Slavic suffix "-vich," "-vic," "-wits," "-witz," or "-wicz," which (-wicz being a Polish variation) means "son of," "child of," "family of," "clan of," etc. So, the last name Abramowitz means "son of (or "child, family, clan of") Avraham" (with variations that include Abramovich, Abraham, Avraham, Abrahams, Abrams, Abramoff, Abramsky, Abramson, Abramzada and Ben Avraham), Itzkowitz (also Isaacs) means "son of Yitzchak," and Jacobowitz translates into "son of Yaakov" (variations include Jacobs, Jacobson, and Jacoby). Of course, this means that Manishevitz translates as "son of Menashe" (the son of Yosef) and Horowitz as "son of Chur."

Greenery and Survival

The Holocaust survivor, R' Tzvi Hirsch Meisels wrote:⁶

When we traveled in the cattle car, we were not given food or drink at all. We were tormented by the acute hunger and thirst to the extent that we came close to death from the agony of starvation. Finally we disembarked from the train and picked the weeds that grew in the fields. We ate them just as they were, and those grasses strengthened us and tided us over this critical period, enabling us to remain alive.

That was when I clearly understood the pasuk, וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך ואכלת את עשב השדה, thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field.⁷ In our case, the grass was a lifesaver. We came to appreciate the nourishment and nutritional value of herbs as well as their medicinal healing properties for various illnesses. We inmates were in pathetic physical condition and those weeds helped us overcome

our frailty. We lived on those weeds until we were finally able to obtain food fit for humans. Perhaps that's the reason the sages say⁸ that tears flowed from Adam's eyes when he was told that he would 'eat the grass of the field.' Adam had us in mind...



Here is another story on this topic, with a practical lesson. Prior to the Holocaust, R' Yisrael Gustman (1903-1991) was once traveling outside Vilna with R' Chaim Ozer. R' Chaim Ozer spent a nice amount of time pointing out to R' Gustman various plants, explaining which types were good to eat and which were poisonous. At the time, R' Gustman was puzzled, as to why R' Chaim Ozer, who pursued Torah his entire life, would spend his time on this. During the Holocaust, R' Gustman got his answer as he and his family hid from the Nazis in the forest, where they were dependent on whatever wild plants he could gather for nourishment. He credited R' Chaim Ozer with prophetic foresight in techniques of wilderness survival. After the Holocaust, R' Gustman lived in America, and eventually made his way to Yerushalayim where he headed the Netzach Yisrael yeshiva. There he would personally water the plants in the Yeshiva courtyard until the end of his life as a mark of gratitude toward the plants to which he owed his life.

A Morphed Move

On the first night of Pesach we have numerous Mitzvos including Pesach, Matza, Marror, the four cups and Hallel. Indeed, it is called חג המצות (Chag Hamatzos) which can also be read as חג המצות (Chag Hamitzvos), the Yom Tov of Mitzvos. This is in contrast to פסח של שביעי where we have no special Mitzvos associated with the day. The Chidushai Harim⁹ tells us this is because חג המצות של שביעי is holier than the first day of Pesach and therefore doesn't need Mitzvos like the first day has. This is similar to that of לעתיד לבא, the future, where there will be no Mitzvos.¹⁰

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of seven books including the recently released "Remarkable Insights about Death and the Afterlife." His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

⁵ R' Yechiel Michel Stern in his Otzar Hayedios, Volume 1, p. 204. Here are some interesting Hebrew roots to some anglicized first names: Suzannah (Sue, Suzy) from Shoshana; Elizabeth (Liz, Lisa, Beth, Betsy, Betty) from Elisheva; Anna, Helena, Hannah from Chana; Jessica from Yiska (the name of Sarah — Breishis 11:29, Rashi); Diana from Dina; John, Jonathan from Yonasan; Jeremy, Jerry and Gerold from Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah).

⁶ Shu"t Mekadshai Hashem, Shaar Machmadim, 15. R' Meisels explains that he wrote some remarkable events connected to Kidush Hashem that he witnessed in Auschwitz when Jews were being led to the gas chambers so that future generations may be aware of the victims' great devotion and holiness. These stories were collected in Shaar Machmadim Zer Zahav. This title contains initials from the names of his father, mother, mother-in-law and brother, who were all killed *Al Kidush Hashem*. His wife and six of his children were murdered in Auschwitz while a seventh died while serving in a labor unit of the Hungarian army (He did have four sons though that did survive the Holocaust including R' Dov Berish Meisels

who was rabbi of the Satmar community in Boro Park and R' Dovid Meisels who was the rabbi of the Satmar community in Montreal.). Under the heading *Yizkor Hashem* in Shaar Machmadim Zer Zahav, the author lists the names of his relatives killed in the Holocaust: His children, Shlomo, Baila, Shalom Yechezkel, Miriam Achsa, Chaim Yaakov, Chana Rochel, Bracha; his father Dovid Dov; his mother Rosa Blima; his mother-in-law Sheindel; his brother Yaakov. While in Auschwitz R' Tzvi Hirsch Meisels made halachic decisions on fateful issues that arose there. While standing before the crematoria he took it upon himself to publish a sefer that would include Torah novellae about the kedoshim, and to address the question of agunos, pledges that he later fulfilled.

⁷ Breishis 3:18.

⁸ Pesachim 118a.

⁹ Shevii Shel Pesach, s.v. mah.

¹⁰ Nida 61b.