

What's in a Name?¹

As each of my pregnancies progressed, my husband and I discussed possible names for our soon-to-be newborn baby. We pored over lists, girls' and boys' names, as well as names of deceased relatives.

Despite our many hours of deliberation, we didn't name any of our children after the names we had initially chosen. As each child was finally born, we looked deeply into the newborn's eyes and just knew what the name should be.

Parents have a form of divine prophecy when they name their children. A name is intrinsically connected to the essence of the individual's soul and is the channel through which his or her spiritual life force flows. That's why to arouse someone from a deep sleep or even a faint, call them by name. To get a person's full attention or affection, address him by his name.

A generation ago, the Nazis dehumanized our people by discarding our names and treating us as numbers. By robbing us of our names, they tried to rob us of our humanity.

Names are a big part of this week's Torah portion, which is called Shemot, "Names," and is also the title for the entire book of Exodus.

The portion starts with G-d calling names:

And these are the names of the children of Israel who came into Egypt
...—EXODUS 1:1-2

G-d counted the tribes again now, to express His love for them, **by calling each one by his individual name**. (Rashi)

The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 1:28) learns from this that the Jews in Egypt did not change their Jewish names.

Even though they assimilated into Egyptian culture, the Jews held strong to their names, language, and clothing. This steadfastness would become their weapon in their spiritual battle to preserve their unique identity as the Jewish people.

When Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, went to bathe in the Nile, she noticed a basket floating and realized that the baby inside must be one of the Hebrew slaves.

Batya's name means, "daughter of G-d" Though she was the daughter of Pharaoh who terrorized, enslaved, and murdered the Jews, Batya acted as the daughter of G-d by risking her life to save Moses.

Batya named this Hebrew baby, Moses. Although Moses had seven different names, the name that the Torah calls him and the name by which G-d addresses him is the name given to him by Batya, due to her selfless act. Perhaps that's the message of this portion and the entire book of Shemot. To experience our own personal exodus, we need to view every person as an individual with his or her own exclusive set of struggles and challenges.

To preserve our humanity and to see another's humanity, we must see them as a name—each one as an individual with a unique story and a unique destiny.

What's your Hebrew name? How does it connect to your mission and individuality?

1. Exodus 1:1

¹These are the **NAMES (sh'mot)** of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: ²Reuben (1), Simeon (2), Levi (3) and Judah (4); ³Issachar (9), Zebulun (10) and Benjamin (12); ⁴Dan (5) and Naphtali (6); Gad (7) and Asher (8). ⁵The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph (11) was already in Egypt.

a. ¹These are **the names** (וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת)—Lit., "**And**, these are the names"...

1) The book should have commenced with the word אֵלֶּה, without the prefix ו just as the last Book of the Torah commences with the words אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים, "these are the words," without a prefix ו. The reason the Torah wrote the prefix letter ו in this instance was to establish a continuity with the paragraph describing the descent of Yaakov to Egypt in Genesis 46:8. The Torah wanted to be sure that we understand that what is mentioned there and what is mentioned here are one and the same thing.²

b. The word "name" (שֵׁם) in Hebrew is NOT simply a reference to someone's (or something's) "designation" that makes it possible to distinguish him (her or it) from others.

c. The concept of personal names in the (Hebrew Bible) often included **existence, character, and reputation** (1Sam 25:25). Often the plural form of *shem* is rendered as "persons" (Exo 1:1, above).

1) 1Samuel 25:25

May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. **He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him.**

2) Matthew 1:21

She will give birth to a son, and **you are to give him the name Yeshua, because he will save his people from their sins.**"

¹ Chana Weisberg, *Shabbat deLights, Bereishit/Shemot*, (Chabad.org), pp. 153-155.

² Rabbi Eliyahu Munk, *Torah Commentary by Rabbi Bachya ben Asher*, Vol. 3, (Lambda Publishers, Inc), p. 742.

- 3) Cf. Num 1:2, 18, 20; Num 3:40,43; Num 26:55.
- d. Further “to cut off the name” of someone was equal to liquidating the person himself (Deu 7:24; Deu 9:14; 1Sam 24:21 [H 22] etc.).
- e. The name chosen for a child was often descriptive of the parent's wishes or expectations for the personality that was to mature—**this is particularly evident in the re-naming process, e.g. Jacob becoming Israel (Gen 35:10).**
- f. Several important ... prepositional phrases using *shem* must be observed. **“To call one’s name” over something signifies ownership, possession, and protection**, e.g., of David over a city (2Sam 12:28), of seven women requesting one man’s name (Isa 4:1), of God over the nations, (Amos 9:12) and over Israel (Isa 63:19). This is to be sharply set off from the (phrase) “to appoint a name” (*sim shem*) (Jud 8:31; 2Kings 17:34; Neh 9:7) which means “to confer a new name.” More usual is the sense of commission by the use of *b’shem Adonai* (“in the name of the LORD”) (or *bish-mi*) (1Sam 17:45; 1Kings 18:32; Jer 14:14; Deu 18:20).
- g. Other examples:
- 1) Genesis 2:19
Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man **to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.**
 - 2) Exodus 33:17
And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and **I know you by name.**”
 - 3) Deuteronomy 7:24
He will give their kings **into your hand**, and you will **WIPE OUT THEIR NAMES** from under heaven. No one will be **able to stand up against you; YOU WILL DESTROY THEM.**
 - 4) Deuteronomy 32:3-4 (cf. 2Sam 22:31)
³I will proclaim **the name of the LORD** ... ⁴He is the Rock, **his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.**
 - 5) 1Samuel 17:45
David said to the Philistine ... “I come against you **in the name of the LORD** Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

- 6) Isaiah 43:1
But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; **I have summoned you by name**; you are mine.
- 7) Jeremiah 7:11-13
¹¹Has this house, **which bears my Name**, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD. ¹²“Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling **for my Name**, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.
- 8) Isaiah 64:7-9
⁷No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. ⁸Yet, O **LORD, you are our Father**. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand ...
- 9) Jeremiah 23:5-6
⁵“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. **This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.**
- 10) Ezekiel 48:1
“**These are the tribes, listed by name**: At the northern frontier, Dan will have one portion ...
- 11) Psalms 147:4 (cf., Isa 40:26)
He determines the number of the stars and **calls them each by name.**
- 12) Baruch 2:11 (NJB)
And now, Lord, God of Israel, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand, with signs and wonders, with great power and with outstretched arm, **to win yourself a name such as you have today** ...
- 13) Mark 9:35-37
³⁵Sitting down, Yeshua called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” ³⁶He took a little child ... Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one of these little children **in my name welcomes me ... and ... the one who sent me.**”
- 14) John 1:12
Yet **to all who received him, to those who believed in his name**, he gave the right to become children of God ...

15) John 10:1-3

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

²The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.

³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. **He calls his own sheep by name** and leads them out.

16) John 14:13-14 (cf. Jn 16:23-24)

¹³And I will do whatever you **ask in my name**, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴You may ask me for anything **in my name**, and I will do it.

a) The disciple's standing with God depended on what Yeshua's accomplished on their behalf.

b) The disciples could approach the Father directly by virtue of Yeshua's "work," person, character, and authority.

17) John 1:14

¹⁴I hope to see you (Gaius) soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. **Greet the friends there by name.**

2. The order listed here is **NOT** in the order of their birth (Gen 29-30).

a. **It is NOT** the order of the prophetic blessings of either Jacob (Gen 49) or Moses (Deu 33).

b. **It is NOT** the order of their encampment in the wilderness (Num 2).

c. **It is NOT** the order of the census-narratives in Numbers (1,26).

d. **It is NOT** the order of their tribal allotment in Transjordan and Canaan (Josh 13-19).

e. **It is NOT** the order of the "sealing" of the Twelve-Tribes during the "Great Tribulation" (Rev 7).

f. **It is NOT** the order of their tribal allotment at the beginning of the Millennial Reign of the Messiah (Ezek 47).

g. **Benjamin is listed 7th—but he is the youngest—he should have been mentioned last—but, the last one mentioned is Joseph. What is the reason for this?**

h. Rabbenu Bachya gives us two reasons why Joseph is mentioned last:

1) So that the children of the matriarchs, Rachel and Leah would not feel superior to the children of the handmaids—that is why Dan, Naftali, Gad and Asher are mentioned between Benjamin and Joseph.

2) **Since Joseph was the greatest in position and honor, he was mentioned last as a sign of humility.**

a) This is the way of the righteous, the more honor that the Holy One heaps upon them, the more humility and modesty they add to themselves.

b) Similarly, when Moses appointed Joshua to be his successor (Deu 32:44), his name was written in a shortened form, without the first letter (הוֹשֵׁעַ not הוֹשֵׁעַ)—this shows that **even though he received such greatness, he lowered and humbled himself.**

3) Mark 9:33-35

³³They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴But **they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.** ³⁵Sitting down, Yeshua called the Twelve and said, **"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."**

3. What do Jacob's son's names mean?

a. Genesis 29:32

³²Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him **Reuben (Leah1)**, for she said, "It is because the LORD **has seen** my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

b. Genesis 29:33

³³She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD **heard** that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him **Simeon (Leah2).**

c. Genesis 29:34

³⁴Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become **attached** to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named **Levi (Leah3).**

d. Genesis 29:35

³⁵She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will **praise** the LORD." So she named him **Judah (Leah4).** Then she stopped having children.

e. Genesis 30:18

¹⁸Then Leah said, "God has **rewarded** me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him **Issachar (Leah5).**

f. Genesis 30:20

²⁰Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with **honor**, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him **Zebulun (Leah6).**

g. Genesis 35:18

¹⁸As (Rachel) breathed her last—for **she was dying**—she named her son **Ben-Oni** ('son of my sorrow'). But his father named him **Benjamin** ('son of my right [hand]') (**Rachel2**).

h. Genesis 30:6

Then Rachel said, "God has **vindicated (lit., judged)** me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him **Dan (Bilhah1)**.

i. Genesis 30:8

⁸Then Rachel said, "I have had a great **struggle** with my sister, and I have won." So she named him **Naphtali (Bilhah2)**.

j. Genesis 30:9-11

⁹Leah ... took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹Then Leah said, "What **good fortune!**"¹¹ So she named him **Gad (Zilpah1)**.

k. Genesis 30:12-13

¹²Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³Then Leah said, "How **happy** I am! The women will call me **happy**." So she named him **Asher (Zilpah2)**.

l. Genesis 30:24

²⁴She named him **Joseph (Rachel1)**, and said, "May the LORD **add** to me another son."

4. *G-d counted the tribes again now, to express His love for them, **by calling each one by his individual name.** (Rashi)*

a. Exodus 33:12-17

¹²Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, '**I know you by name and you have found favor with me.**'"¹³If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."¹⁴The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."¹⁵Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."¹⁶How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"¹⁷And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, **because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.**"

b. Psalms 147:1-5

¹Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! ²The LORD builds up Jerusalem;

he gathers the exiles of Israel. ³He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. **'He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.'** ⁵Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

c. Isaiah 43:1-3

¹But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; **I have summoned you by name; you are mine.**" ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. ³For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.

d. John 10:1-3

¹"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. **He calls his own sheep by name** and leads them out.