

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's and next week's question:

The following questions were raised in regard to naming a child after a relative:

- **The actual name was in another language, and has taken on certain negative connotations in the country in which the couple resides. May they use the name anyhow? If they add a name, and use the added name all the time, does this mean that they have not really named the child for the relative? What if they change the name slightly, translate it into Hebrew, or use a similar sounding Hebrew name?**
- **The relative was not an observant Jew, but had a strong connection to Judaism and to observant family members. Is there any concern with naming after this relative?**
- **The deceased was relatively observant, but was adamant on being cremated rather than be given a traditional Jewish burial. Is this a critical factor in using the name?**
- **What if the child will immediately be called by a nick-name, and this original called name is used only in a sacred context?**

The issues in this issue:

- A) *Shaim kodesh*, the Jewish name; naming a child
- B) *Kinuy shaim ra*, embarrassing names

Next week:

- C) Names of sinners
- D) Changing a name
- E) *Kinuy*, a nick-name
- F) Cremation

A) Jewish names

The word we use for G-d, Hashem, means 'the name'. We may not utter His holy names unnecessarily, so we use the word for name, with a definite article. Everything has a name. The ultimate name is that of the First Cause of everything. We cannot fully fathom His names, but the meanings of their usage in the Scriptures has been passed down to us. Each of those names has a different meaning, that is meant to connect to His specific 'attributes' in that context. [This is explained at length by the commentaries in today's *parsha*.] The first mention of calling something is when Hashem called *ohr 'yom'*, light being called day. The first mention of names in the Torah is in reference to rivers. The next mention is in reference to the naming of the animals by Adam. Hashem left it to Adam to decide the names of the animals. This then became the 'name'. This needs to be explained, as we shall see. In another context, Hashem names every star in the heavens. In the same context, Hashem also counts the stars, or according to some, He gives each star a number. This, too, must be explained.

In any language, the term 'name' means a number of different things. It identifies the person, so that he or she is no longer an unknown entity, that almost does not exist. It

also identifies the person specifically, since the whole purpose of the name is to distinguish between this person and that person. This could be done with a number, but the use of a name has more personal meaning. A name also means famous or well-known, even on a small scale. It also refers to a reputation, as in a good or bad name. In most contexts, it also represents the essence of something. That is, the name might be some linguistic form of another word or words, perhaps contracted or changed. These might mean a specific quality or they might be connected to events, people, phenomena or the like. The purpose is to impart a sense of the item, place or person.

To answer the earlier questions, we know that Hashem created the world with ten utterances. These were in the Hebrew language, the holy tongue. Before he created anything, he created the language, beginning with the *alef-bais* and the vowels, and progressing to the words, including names for everything. Thus, when He said “let there be *ohr*”, light, He uttered that word, and it came into existence. Accordingly, he created each animal using its name. Adam called them all by a name as well. Either this means that Hashem had a reason to change the names to what Adam thought of, or that Hashem wanted to show the level of intelligence that Adam had in understanding the nature of every animal, or Hashem showed that Adam's intelligence led him to name the animals exactly as Hashem had named them. In any event, this incident shows how deeply the name used by a human is connected to the original nature of the being, that Hashem had in mind from its creation. Each name of a river can also be understood to have been created before humans called it by that name. The names were then handed to Adam. Or, the Torah acknowledges the names given by the humans with the same type of divinely inspired intelligence. Thus, when a name is given, it clearly has a measure of divinely inspired intelligence. The number or purpose of stars is well beyond human comprehension. This is the very purpose of that verse. It teaches us that though we might not be able to count the stars, nor number them, Hashem has His reasons and purposes for them. Furthermore, each of them has its own essence embodied in its name.

This inspiration is given to those who name a child. As he or she develops, the name will become synonymous with the identity and spiritual calling of that child. The Jewish name is called the *shaim kodesh*, holy name. This is the term used in *halachic* contexts for Hashem's names used in the Scriptures as opposed to mundane uses of a similar word. When the Israelites were counted, it was by their names. The name is also used when we wish to pray for the person. Indeed, this is the first time the name is used. At the time of the *bris milah*, a name is given to the boy in the middle of a *tefilah*, and for a girl, a *tefilah* is made in *shul* over a *sefer Torah*. The name allows a person to be mentioned in the heavens. The names of the tribes of Yisroel were engraved on the vestments of the *kohain gadol* when he served in the temple. We have a tradition that every Jew's name is to be found somewhere in the Torah. Thus there is a holiness to the name, and the person naming him or her is actually tapping in to the source of that holiness.

The Midrash says that one has three names: one that is given by his parents, one that he is called by others and one that is 'written in the book of his creation'! Some maintain that one has seven names, all connected to his soul: Ploni the son of his father's name; P. the son of his mother's name; P. the son of his father and his mother's names together; P.

son of his father, son of **his** father (the grandfather); named with the great-grandfather; named with the tribe/family; named for his occupation; name as he is commonly known.

Generally, the parents name the child. There are exceptions, such as Moshe being named, apparently, by the daughter of Paroh, and Oved, son of Ruth, named by her neighbors. Sometimes, Hashem names a person, but He tells the parent to formally do it, as we see in the cases of Yitzchok and Yishmael. While it is divinely inspired, the parents choose the name and are responsible for it. The *Midrash* says that in earlier times, names were based on events, because there was no need to record lineage. Nowadays we need to preserve lineage. Therefore, we name after ancestors.

As a name has meaning in the language used, names were originally created in Hebrew. This was the language used by the Jews, perhaps together with Aramaic, used by our forefathers. In Egypt, before the Torah was given, the Israelites preserved their distinctive names and their language. During the various exiles, other languages were also used, introducing other names in those languages. These include Greek names like Klonymus, meaning a good name (which was subsequently changed to ShemTov in some places), Latin names like Benedict or Bendit, Phoebus or Feivish, French names like Leon, Arabic names like Maimon, Spanish names like Vidal or Reyna, German names like Wolf, and so on. Sometimes, a name in one language morphed into a name in another language, such as Feivel from Phoebus, or Shprintze from Esperanza.

The poskim debate whether these were originally accepted, or they became accepted with the passage of time. Some say that the words were taken from the language, but were turned into names by Jews. Originally, a single name was usually given. Sometimes, a Hebrew name is given with its translation or explanation in another language. According to some, when the rulers insisted on a German name, it was given on *Shabbos* with a *mi shebairach*. The Hebrew name for a boy was then added at the *bris*. Women's names are not as well documented in *Tanach*, so most women's names are in the spoken language, such as Yiddish-German. Many women's names are simple identification methods that turned into names. For example a girl with golden hair would be called Golda, with yellow hair, Gella. The name Charna is Polish for black. Alta, as a girl's name, could come from a Romance language and could mean tall.

Some names in the foreign language are actually translations of the Hebrew, such as Zalman for Shlomo, from Salomon, or Eizik for Yitzchok from Isaac. Some are contractions or corruptions of the Hebrew, such as Aba or Abish from Avraham, or Yankel or Koppel for Yaakov, from Ya'a(n)kov, with the sounded ayin, or the Kob from Jacob that turned into Kobel and softened to Koppel. Some Hebrew names are translations of the foreign name. For example, Leon was connected to Yehuda, the lion. This became Aryeh. Wolf was associated with Binyamin. This became Zev. There is a biblical Zev, but he was a gentile general and would not have Jewish children named after him. Efrayim was blessed to reproduce like fish. The name Fishel was attached to him. Some names seem to have attached themselves with no obvious reason. Mordechai is connected to Gimpel, which is the German for a bull-finch. It seems that Mordechai was associated with poetic speech, and a songbird was used as his nick-name. Some German-Yiddish names turned into family names. For example, the name Meizels, means the son of

Meizel, or Mousey, a woman's name hardly used anymore. The name Grossman was originally attached to the name Gedaliah, which has a connotation of greatness.

When a conflict arose on which name to use, there was a choice: use one name making the other party unhappy, use a combined name incorporating the meanings of both, or use both names. This led to a debate on which of these is preferred. All of these methods are used nowadays, often with rabbinical guidance. Clearly, a *shaim kodesh* need not appear in the *Tanach*, can be in any language, and can be fashioned from scratch. It is still considered the person's holy name. [See Parshas Beraishis 2:19-20 Shemos 3:13-15 Bemidbar 1:2 Tehilim 147:4, commentaries. Brochos 7b Yuma 83b. Koheless Rabasi 7:3, 41. Tanchuma Haazinu 7. Sefer Yetzira Perek 2-4 etc. Tur, BY, Sh Ar EH 129, commentaries. Yosef ometz, end. References in Sefer Habris, Mekor Ubiur Halacha 10. Bais Aharon II, end. Igros Moshe EHIII:35.]

(B) Kinuy shem ra

It is forbidden to call someone by an embarrassing name. This is included in a number of *mitzvos*, depending on the view. The Talmud says that it applies even if the nickname has been used for a while. Some say this means that one may not instigate the calling of a negative name, nor may one use such a name that was introduced by others. Some say that this means that the person is not embarrassed by it. It is still forbidden on an ethical level. Some poskim seem to omit this case. The main *mitzvos* violated by using a bad name are *ona'ah*, exploitation and teasing, and *lo sisa alav chait*, do not embarrass. The poskim seem to explain this to forbid using a *kinuy*, nick-name. That is, the person has his own name, and one calls him by this negative name as well. This is singled out as one of those violations that cause one to lose his share in the Next World.

It would seem obvious that a parent may certainly not name a child such that he or she will later be embarrassed by it. Usually, this happens when a name in a foreign language is used, such as Bendit, which sounds like bandit. It can also apply if a name has become negative slang, like Shmerel, which is really a corruption of the Hebrew name Shmaryahu, but has taken on a connotation of a clumsy fool. Yenta is a corruption of the Latin Jentil or Gentile, which became Yentel, and then Yenta. For whatever reason, this name became associated with a chatterbox or a gossip. The same seems to have happened to Yachne, which really seems to derive from the Hebrew *Chen*, grace.

Sometimes a biblical name can sound strange to others, such as Yemimah/Jemimah, or Osnath, which is considered a beautiful name in Israel, but in other countries sounds like snot. Conversely, some Yiddish names can be embarrassing in Israel, where the language sounds old-fashioned. Thus, a parent naming his child must bear in mind that the child could be the object of jeers later in life. [See Baba Metzia 58b, Rashi. Rambam Dayos 6:8 Teshuva 3:14. Tur BY Sh Ar CM 228:5, commentaries.] *to be continued ...*

On the parsha .. [Moshe] called his [son's] name Gershom .. I was a stranger in a foreign land. [2:28] Should everyone in galus be called Gershom? Moshe wanted to show, for all time, that using a local name could make one forget he is in *galus* and cause assimilation.

Sponsored in memory of Menachem Manale ben Zev, whose *yahrzeit* is the 23rd of Taivais. 🕯

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