

At the back of the sanctuary, we have a file of Hebrew names of nearly everyone in the congregation. We created this file to make the the Torah service flow better. No need to wait while the *oleh* struggles to remember and communicate their Hebrew name and their parents' Hebrew names clearly. Cantor Fair, or whoever is calling up aliyot, can easily say the Mi Sheberakh prayer for the aliyah and insert the name on the card in front of him.

But it seem to me that we've lost something by creating this file. Essentially, what we've done is allow you to outsource your name. We know your name and we've recorded it in our file so you don't have to remember it. We remember it for you. We make it possible for you not to have your Hebrew name on the tip of your tongue. We allow you to forget your name.

If we were talking about the name that appears on our driver's license and state ID and social security card and Medicare card and credit cards, this would be absurd. Other than a person with an advanced type of dementia, what person forgets their name? But that's only when we identify ourselves by our name, when it fundamentally defines who we are, and when we use that particular name all the time. A name that you don't use often is not part of your fundamental identity. Plus, it's a name rooted in a language, typically Hebrew or Yiddish, that you don't use every day. So it's hard to pronounce and not part of your everyday discourse, and slips away from you, and you forget your own name.

My message today is simple. Names are important. Remembering names is a sign that we care about another person, and we can turn this principle inward onto ourselves. When we cannot recall one of our own names, it means that we've lost part of the connection to the aspect of ourselves represented by that name.

The truth for much of American Jewry is that with bifurcated identities, we don't use our Jewish name very often. So we are not continually connected to that aspect of ourselves as we are with our "regular" name. Some of us have been given names by our parents that serve both as English and Hebrew names, and some of us use Hebrew names as our primary name. But most of us have two names that at the most share an initial letter. Mark becomes Mordechai, Bob becomes Beryl, Sally becomes Shoshanah.

An additional challenge is that our most formal Hebrew name, the one we use when we are called up to the Torah, includes the Hebrew or Yiddish name of either our parents or of two ancestral names that connect us to the age-old family tree of the Jewish people. And while this name file might make our service flow better, it eliminates one of the only moments when you are asked to remember and produce your full Hebrew name and when you explicitly place yourself in the chain of Jewish history and tradition. And that feels like a loss.

So this Rosh Hashanah I want to ask you to connect with your Hebrew name and to internalize it deeply. I want you to know your full name, memorize your full name, know what it means, know something about who you are named after or why you chose that name for yourself, and understand the source and qualities of the rest of your name, the names designated as your parents, whether they are your biological parents, your adoptive parents, or your chosen parents. For some, this is not much of an ask. For others, it is a bit of a challenge. I think it's a worthwhile endeavor to begin the new year for several reasons:

- I want you to be comfortable going to other synagogues that don't have your name on file and taking a Torah honor.
- I want you to take pride in the Jewish name your parents gave you, or you gave yourself. It represents the history of your Jewish connections. Why do you have this name? Who are you named after? What are their strongest qualities? What does your name mean? Is

your name Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, does it come from a Greek or Spanish or Arabic name, is it a Biblical, Rabbinic, Medieval, or Modern name? If you share a name with characters from the Bible or Rabbinic literature, who were they?

- I want you to be able to write and spell your name in Hebrew letters, in case you are asked to sign a Jewish document like a ketubah.
- I want you to be able to say your name clearly. Knowing your Hebrew name fluently moves the Jewish aspect of your bifurcated self out from the shadows, even if just for a moment.
- Your name says something about you, actual or aspirational. Some of the earliest and most important figures of our history were given names denoting their role in creating the Jewish covenant with God. Avram’s name change to Avraham and Sarai’s name change to Sarah describe our ancestors’ incorporation of God into their name. Ya’akov name changing to Yisrael describes the importance of wrestling with and challenging one’s faith and practice, while Moses describes the quality of drawing out of or through water, symbolic of taking us through redemption. Your name, explicitly or implicitly, probably contains a reference to a relationship with God that is part of your identity as a Jew.

If you need help with pronunciation, spelling, or writing, ask me. I can send you a copy of your card, I can teach you how to say and write the words. There is great power in names. I am Harav David Yehudah ben Elkanah u’Devorah, My father was Elkhanah ben Zalman u’Miriam, My paternal grandfather was Zalman ben Yehudah. My mother is Devorah bat Yoel u’Feigel. My maternal grandfather was Yoel ben David. My maternal grandmother was Feigel bat Velvel. This collection of names describes a part of my Jewish journey, from Belarus and Romania and Hungary and Russia to Minneapolis and Chicago and New York and Grand Rapids.

Zelda Schneurson Mishkovsky was an outstanding contemporary Hebrew poet, a religious woman, a first cousin to the late seventh Chabad Rebbe, whose poems evoke highly spiritual images using simple and direct language. I’ll conclude with a few lines from her poem, one of my favorite Hebrew poems, entitled, “Everyone Has a Name.” If you’d like to read the whole poem, along with a series of questions about names prompted by the lines of the poem, you can download this sermon from the synagogue website or call the office.

<p>Everyone has a name given to him by God and given to him by his parents Everyone has a name given to him by his stature and the way he smiles and given to him by his clothing ...</p>	<p>לכל איש יש שם שנתן לו א-לוהים ונתנו לו אביו ואמו לכל איש יש שם שנתנו לו קומתו ואופן חיוכו ונתן לו האריג ...</p>
<p>Everyone has a name given to him by the sea and given to him by his death.</p>	<p>לכל איש יש שם שנתן לו הים ונתן לו מותו.</p>

Zelda Schneurson Mishkovsky, June 20, 1914 – April 30, 1984

Everyone Has a Name

Everyone has a name
 given to him by God
 and given to him by his parents
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by his stature
 and the way he smiles
 and given to him by his clothing
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by the mountains
 and given to him by his walls
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by the stars
 and given to him by his neighbors
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by his sins
 and given to him by his longing
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by his enemies
 and given to him by his love
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by his feasts
 and given to him by his work
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by the seasons of the
 year
 and given to him by his blindness
 Everyone has a name
 given to him by the sea
 and given to him
 by his death.

(Adapted from the translation of
 Marcia Falk)

לכל איש יש שם
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתן לו א-לוהים
 ונתנו לו אביו ואמו
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתנו לו קומתו ואופן חיוכו
 ונתן לו האריג
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתנו לו ההרים
 ונתנו לו כתליו
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתנו לו המזלות
 ונתנו לו שכניו
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתנו לו חטאיו
 ונתנה לו כמיהתו
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתנו לו שונאיו
 ונתנה לו אהבתו
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתנו לו חגיו
 ונתנה לו מלאכתו
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתנו לו עונות השנה
 ונתן לו עיוורונו
 לכל איש יש שם
 שנתן לו הים
 ונתן לו
 מותו.

What name did God give you?

What name did your parents give you?

What name does your physical presence give you?

What name does your clothing give you?

What name do the things that challenge you and limit you, your mountains and walls, give you?

What name does your fortune give you, or the neighbors who gossip about you?

What name do your mistakes give you, and your regrets?

What name do your enemies give you?

What name do your friends give you?

What name do your coworkers give you?

What name does your response to the vicissitudes of life give you?

What name do your prejudices give you?

What name do your adventurous moments give you?

How do you want to be known after you die?