

What's Your Name? And Why Does It Matter?

What is your name? If you are like most people, you probably have more than one name. You may have been given more than one name at birth, or maybe you changed your name at some point for one reason or another. Perhaps you have a nickname. According to Jewish tradition, every person has at least three names—and one of these names is more important than the others.

For example, my father, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, grew up in Ottawa, Canada, where his father, Rabbi Simon Eckstein, served as the chief rabbi of Canada's capital city. My grandfather was a distinguished man, a noted psychologist, a spiritual leader and a respected teacher. However, the title that my grandfather was most proud of was the nickname given to him by his longtime congregants. They called him "the hugger rabbi," which reflected my grandfather's warmth, empathy and penchant for embracing all types of people, both figuratively and literally, in a heartfelt hug. He actually gave out "hug coupons," redeemable for one free hug!

We read in the Bible in Numbers 10:29 about a conversation that Moses had with his father-in-law, Hobab. But if you recall, when we first meet Moses' then-to-be father-in-law back in Exodus 2, his name is Jethro. Is this the same man? Or did Moses marry another woman and have a new father-in-law?

The Jewish sages say the man called Hobab in Numbers 10:29 is, in fact, Jethro, the same father-in-law that Moses had all along. Somewhere along the way, Jethro was given the name "Hobab," which means "beloved," because of his deep love and commitment to the Word of God. As the sages explained, biblical figures often had more than one name throughout their lives reflecting different aspects of their character.

According to Jewish tradition, we are each given a name at birth, which is divinely inspired and deeply significant. However, as we go through our lives, we have the opportunity to create a name for ourselves. We get to choose, by way of our character and deeds, how others will think about us when they hear our name. Sometimes, like my grandfather, we might even earn an affectionate nickname. Most importantly, we determine the significance of our name to our Father in heaven.

When my father established The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews in 1983, he endured a lot of painful criticism from both faith communities. He was misjudged by leaders on both sides who misunderstood his mission and motivation for bringing Christians and Jews together. It took decades of hard work and perseverance before my father was recognized and respected for all of the good he did in his lifetime.

As you may already know, my father died suddenly from a heart attack at the age of 67. At his funeral, he was eulogized as a trailblazer, a bridge-builder and a person with a huge heart, whose passion was to help others.

At the burial, one of my nephews started to cry out “Saba! I want Saba!” over and over again. It broke our hearts. *Saba* means grandfather in Hebrew, and of all the terms that were used that day to describe my father, this would have been the one that he cared most about. He was a family man, and he meant the world to his children and grandchildren. It was his name.

This is what the third name we are given is all about. We aren’t always recognized by others for who we truly are. Some people are perceived as being greater than they really are, and some people are only fully appreciated after they die. But the truth almost always comes out.

According to Jewish tradition, the first question that a person is asked after they pass away and enter the afterlife is, "What is your name?" In other words, what name did you make for yourself? Were you known as a person who was generous and kind? Were you called a lover of God and His Word? Were you known as a person to be counted on?

Ecclesiastes 7:1 (NIV) tells us, "A good name is better than fine perfume." Ultimately, all we take with us when we leave this world is our name; we had better choose it wisely and earn it daily.

Listen to Yael Eckstein on this episode of *Nourish Your Biblical Roots* on Charisma Podcast Network as she shares verses from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and some fascinating Jewish teachings that will help us understand the meaning of our names, the role they play in our spiritual lives and why each one of us has the amazing opportunity to choose a name for ourselves. {eoa}

Yael Eckstein is president and CEO of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (The Fellowship), the largest provider of humanitarian aid in Israel. Annually, The Fellowship raises more than \$127 million, helping 2 million Jews in need in Israel and around the world.

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