

I'VE GOT A NAME

Somebody once told me that bestowing a name is like temporarily being granted the gift of prophecy. In Torah's creation myth, it was one of humanity's first *mitzvot* in our role as the guardians of the Earth-giving names to the myriad of life forms on the planet and thus helping to shape our perception of each living being. I vividly remember the polite pause when Amy and I told our parents that Zoey's middle name would be 'Sky,' (and again when we informed them of Gabriel's middle name, 'Shine') but I also remember our intention: we wanted our children to carry in their very names the wide-open, bright and limitless nature of the heavens. Is it possible that our names help determine the quality and direction of our souls?

Perhaps, especially when we consider that the name given to us at birth is never our sole name. The Yiddish poet Zelda concedes that, "Each of us has a name given by the source of life and given by our parents." But she goes on to posit that we have other names, 'given to us by our stature, our smile; by the stars and by our neighbors; by our enemies and by our love; by our sins and by our longings; by our celebrations and by our work; by the seasons, our blindness and by our death.'

Each time I repeat the ritual phrase, 'Vayikra shemo/shemah beyisrael (and let him or her be known in the House of Israel as...)' at a baby naming and announce a child's Hebrew name, I feel that sense of emerging definition. Often, the Jewish name is an opportunity for parents to allow their child to carry the name of a sacred relative now deceased, or to feel the presence of a biblical hero, or to be guided by a spiritual quality. At naming ceremonies, I often project forward, visualizing the sense of discovery and revelation as a youngster is referred to by that name on the first day of Hebrew school, or when called to the Torah as a B'nai Mitzvah. It was not until Amy and I were under the chupah that we discovered that her Hebrew name (Aviva for the season of Spring) and mine (Pesach for Passover) were as meant to be together as we were!

One young man in our congregation is of Native American heritage, so in addition to his everyday name and to his Hebrew name, he has an Ojibway name. In fact, it is customary for members of the Ojibway Nation to be re-named three times corresponding to turning-point moments in the life-cycle. After being given the name 'Fast As An Arrow' at birth, his name has been changed to Naga, Naga Bo (He Who Stands First) just as he is preparing to become a Bar Mitzvah!

Recently, I had the blessing of being on an overnight retreat in the woods with some of our seventh grade students. After sharing, many delightful and holy moments together, we decided to name ourselves based on some of those moments. One young man proudly proclaimed himself to be 'Marracca' because his instrument shaking maintained the beat at our song sessions. Another called

himself 'Playful Fox.' I proudly added 'Firestarter' (campfire) to my list of names I've carried throughout my life.

When we talk about prayer, it is often taught that while we must call God something, the various names we have invented are, in the end, limiting. We too, of course, are more than our names, but our names do play an important and defining role as we journey through this life. I thought you should know that there is not a moment I do not feel completely blessed when I am called 'Rabbi Randy,' one of the names I am honored to carry in the sacred community of CRC.

B' Ahavah (With Love),

Rabbi Randy