

These are the Names:

### Subtlety, Subversion and Surprise in Biblical Names

**Introduction:** What's in a name? We in Judaism might be familiar with the Ashkenazic tradition to bestow names upon newly born children that are connected in some way – sound, meaning, or the exact name – to our beloved ancestors who are no longer alive. We might also have learned that many Sephardic and Eastern Jewish communities give children that are born names of family members who are still alive. At any rate, it can be concluded that a Jewish child that is given a name is given that name with purpose and forethought.

When we compose any written piece, we try to choose our words in a way that we will be best understood. The Tanach (Hebrew Bible) is no different. The Tanach is what I like to call a 'deliberate' text, meaning that there is 'thought' behind the choice of each word that appears in the prose and poetry of this ancient masterpiece. Thus, when we read in the text about characters, some of whom have names and others of whom are anonymous, we are allowed – I would go so far as to say encouraged – to stop and take note of this phenomenon, asking the question, 'Why?'

Our five (5) session course will examine the names that are found in our Tanach and their etymologies. We will meet the characters who carry those names. We will be introduced to the 'unmentionables' as well. We will then query why was this person named 'so-and-so', and why did this person not have a name at all? We will also hope to explore the matter of Midrash (investigative interpretation) and its contribution to the understanding of the names of the Tanach.

These questions are just the beginning of our journey into the names of the Tanach. I ask you to come to class with a Hebrew/English Tanach and be ready to challenge and conjecture, query and consider as we explore the many names in the Tanach (and there are, indeed, many names in the Tanach!

Let's go around and meet everyone, each person sharing the following information about themselves: 1. Your full name, including your middle name (s). 2. The meaning of that/those name(s). 3. Your full name in Hebrew. 4. The meaning of that/those name(s).

In many places in our Tanach, a name is given to a character, accompanied by an etymology with a hope to explain why this person has the name that they have. In other occasions, the name is provided with no explanation whatsoever, leaving the reader/listener with limited options: to offer conjecture as to why the name is what it is; to allow the Midrash to provide the reason(s) behind a name; or to suggest that there is little or no relevance to the name that has been given.

Our course will begin in the beginning, as we explore the names that are introduced in our Tanach. Please be aware that we will not be able to be exhaustive in our research. Quite frankly, there are simply too many names to cover in a five session course.

Unit 1: Adam and Eve

Genesis 1:26-28

<p>26. And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” 27. And God created <b>man</b> in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”</p>	<p><b>כו.</b> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ; וַיִּרְדּוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הַרְמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ. <b>כז.</b> וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלֵּם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקִיבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם. <b>כח.</b> וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשֶׂהּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיַּי הַרְמֵשֶׂת עַל-הָאָרֶץ.</p>
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Genesis 5:1-2

<p>1. This is the record of <b>Adam’s</b> line.—When God created <b>man</b>, He made him in the likeness of God; 2. male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them <b>Man</b>.</p>	<p><b>א.</b> זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם בְּיוֹם בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ. <b>ב.</b> זָכָר וּנְקִיבָה בָּרָאֵם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמֵם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הַבְּרָאָה.</p>
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Genesis 2:22-23

<p>22. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from <b>the man</b> into a woman; and He brought her to <b>the man</b>. 23. Then <b>the man</b> said, “This one at last is bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called <b>Woman</b>, For from <b>man</b> was she taken.”</p>	<p><b>כב.</b> וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִן הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבִאָהּ אֵל הָאָדָם. <b>כג.</b> וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִפְעַם עָצָם מֵעַצְמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ-זֹאת.</p>
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Genesis 3:20

<p>19. By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the <b>ground</b>— For from it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” 20. The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.</p>	<p><b>יט.</b> בְּזַעַת אֶפְיֶיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבֶבְךָ אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי-עָפָר אֶתָּה וְאֶל-עָפָר תָּשׁוּב. <b>כ.</b> וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הוּא הִיְתָה אֵם כָּל-חַיִּי.</p>
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## Unit 2: Cain, Abel and Seth

### Genesis 4:1-2

<p>1. Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore <b>Cain</b>, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help of the Lord." 2. She then bore his brother <b>Abel</b>. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.</p>	<p>א. וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת-יְהוָה. ב. וַתִּסֶּף לָלֶדֶת אֶת-אַחִיו אֶת-הָבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה.</p>
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### Genesis 4:25

<p>25. Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him <b>Seth</b>, meaning, "God has provided me with- another offspring in place of Abel," for Cain had killed him.</p>	<p>כה. וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת כִּי שֵׁת-לִי אֱלֹהִים זָרַע אַחֲרַי--תַּחַת הֶבֶל כִּי הָרְגוּ קַיִן.</p>
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## Unit 3: The Generations from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abraham

### Mishnah Avot 5:2

<p>2. [There were] ten generations from Adam to Noah, in order to make known what long-suffering is His; for all those generations kept on provoking Him, until He brought upon them the waters of the flood. [There were] ten generations from Noah to Abraham, in order to make known what long-suffering is His; for all those generations kept on provoking Him, until Abraham, came and received the reward of all of them.</p>	<p>ב. עֲשָׂרָה דוֹרוֹת מֵאָדָם וְעַד נֹחַ, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה אַרְךְ אֲפִים לְפָנָיו, שְׂכָל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין וּבָאִין עַד שֶׁהֵבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מֵי הַמַּבּוּל. עֲשָׂרָה דוֹרוֹת מִנֹּחַ וְעַד אַבְרָהָם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה אַרְךְ אֲפִים לְפָנָיו, שְׂכָל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין וּבָאִין, עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם וְקִבֵּל עָלָיו שְׂכָר כָּלָם :</p>
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The generations from Adam and Noah and from Noah to Abraham count twenty in all. The Torah provides us with all of the names in succession from Adam all the way to Abraham. (It also gives us ages, but that is for another class on 'Numbers in the Tanach.')

In Hevruta (Break-out rooms), please look at the names of each generation in the lists that are provided in chapters 4, 5 and 10 and provide your own 'etymologies' for the names. They can be connected to the Hebrew name or to the English name that is provided by your translation or any other means by which you might choose to explain the names. Be creative if you can!



Unit #4 – Why are names so important? Sometimes, they are provided in order to give the reader/listener a foreshadowing of what is to come. Perhaps they are an expression of the essence of that individual, כִּי כָשְׁמוֹ כֶן-הוּא – (I Samuel 25:25) which refers to Avigail’s husband Naval. Other times, the sound of the name is what makes it a good choice in a particular place in the text. They may employ paronomasia (word play) or connect us to a preceding or following textual phenomenon. And, at other times, they are just the names that are chosen with no hints as to why. Finally, there are times that the text chooses to bring to the forefront a character who is given no name, leaving the reader/listener pause.

In the four sessions that we have remaining, we will look at these various phenomena. During our time together, we will have the opportunity to ask questions as well as to speculate. Our lessons will focus on the following themes:

- I. Names with etymologies provided by the text itself.
- II. Names with a connection to the Divine.
- III. Contradicting etymologies found in the text.
- IV. No-Names in the narratives of the Tanach.
- V. Fun/clever/noteworthy names.

Jacob had four wives – Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah. The Torah reports that they had a total of 13 children between them. I would say that there were very likely more daughters born in the family, but because they did not enjoy any level of historical importance in the telling of the story, they were not mentioned in the narrative of Genesis. The births and the bestowing of names to these children are recorded in our text. In Hevruta, please study the names and the etymologies of the 12 sons of Israel (Jacob). They are found in Chapters 29 and 30 of Breisheet (Genesis) as well as one report in Genesis 35. Does the English translation offer any assistance in understanding why the children were given their respective names? Who gave the children their names? Moreover, after having gone through the 12 passages, can you conjecture as to the frame of mind of the ‘namers’?

When you have completed this exercise encompassing the 12 sons of Jacob, I ask you to take a look at the process through which Joseph’s two sons are named, as well as a kind of parallel in the Book of Shemot (Exodus) which reports the etymology of the names of Moshe’s two sons.

Please address the following question:

1. Is there anything that can connect these two sets of passages together? Please compare and contrast the two sections.

Genesis 41:51-52

<p>51. Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, “God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home.” 52. And the</p>	<p>נֹא וַיִּקְרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת-שֵׁם הַבְּכוֹר מְנַשֶּׁה כִּי- נִשְׁכַּח אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-עֲמָלִי וְאֵת כָּל-בַּיִת אָבִי. נֹב וְאֵת שֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי קָרָא אֶפְרַיִם כִּי- הִפְרַנִּי אֱלֹהִים בְּאֶרֶץ עֲנִי.</p>
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<p>second he named Ephraim, meaning, “God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction.”</p>	
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Exodus 18:3-4

<p>3. and her two sons—of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land”; 4. and the other was named Eliezer, meaning, “The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.”</p>	<p>ג וְיָאֵת שְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאֶחָד גֵּרְשֹׁם--כִּי אָמַר גֵּר הֵייתִי בְּאֶרֶץ נֹכְרִיהָ. 4. וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר--כִּי-אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי בָּעֲזָרִי וַיַּצֵּלֵנִי מִחֶרֶב פְּרִיעָה.</p>
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