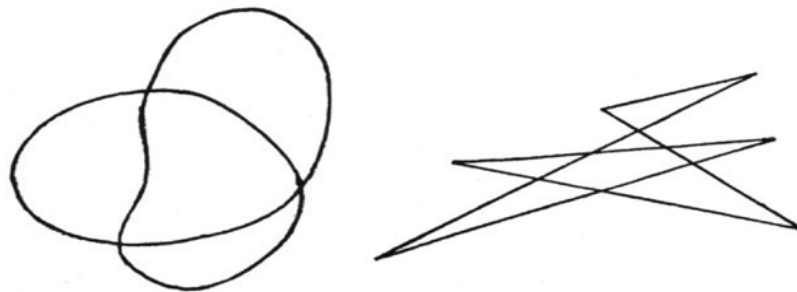


THE POWER OF NAMES

THE NEW YORKER: THE POWER OF NAMES

The German poet Christian Morgenstern once said that “all seagulls look as though their name were Emma.” Though Morgenstern was known for his [nonsense poetry](#), there was truth in his suggestion that some linguistic labels are perfectly suited to the concepts they denote. “Dawdle” and “meander” sound as unhurried as the walking speeds they describe, and “awkward” and “gawky” sound as ungainly as the bodies they represent. When the Gestalt psychologist and fellow German Wolfgang Köhler [read Morgenstern's poem](#), in the nineteen-twenties, he was moved to suggest that words convey symbolic ideas beyond their meaning. To test the idea more carefully, he asked a group of respondents to decide which of the two shapes below was a *maluma* and which was a *takeete*:



If you're like the vast majority of Köhler's respondents, you're compelled by the idea that *malumas* are soft and rounded (like the shape on the left), whereas *takeetes* are sharp and jagged (like that on the right). As Köhler showed, words carry hidden baggage that may play at least some role in shaping thought. What's surprising, perhaps, is how profoundly a single word can shape material outcomes over time.

Bamidbar Rabbah 20:22	במדבר רבה כ: כב
In the merit of four acts of restraint were the Jews redeemed from Egypt - they did not change their names ; they did not change their language; they did not disclose each other's secrets; and they did not break barriers of morality.	בזכות כמה דברים נגאלו ישראל ממצרים, שנו רבותי נו בזכות ד' דברים נגאלו ישראל ממצרים, שלא שינו את שמותן, שלא שינו את לשונם, ולא גילו מסטורין שלהם, ולא נפרצו בעריות

Bereishit 29	בראשית פרק כט
32) And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has seen my affliction, for now my husband will love me."	לב) ותהר לאה ותלד בן ותקרא שמו ראובן כי אמרה כִּירְאָה יְקֹוֹק בְּעֵינַי כִּי עָתָה יֶאֱהָבֵנִי אִישִׁי:
33) And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Since the Lord has heard that I am hated, He gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.	לג) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר כִּישְׁנוֹאָה אֲנִכִּי וַיִּתֶּן־לִי גַם־אֶתִּזָּה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן:
34) And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, for I have borne him three sons; therefore, He named him Levi.	לד) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר עָתָה הִפַּעַם יִלְוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי־לִדְתִּי לוֹ שְׁלִשָּׁה בָנִים עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ לְוִי:
35) And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "This time, I will thank the Lord! Therefore, she named him Judah, and [then] she stopped bearing.	לה) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הִפַּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת־יְקֹוֹק עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֵד מִלִּדֹת:

RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH: BEREISHIT 29: 32-35

The names she gave her sons show that, which each new son that she presented to her husband, his attitude toward her became more and more loving. At first: **ראַה** ה' **בעני**. Previously, Yaakov's preference for Rachel was visible and apparent to all. That changed with the birth of **ראובן**. But to Leah's ear, the preference was still audible. From the tone of Yaakov's voice, Leah sensed that she had not yet won the full measure of his love. Hence, she named her second son " **שמעון** ".

With the birth of her third son, however, she felt that the imbalance had been entirely erased. She expressed her full confidence that her relationship with her husband would now be pure and true: **לילה אישי אלי**. Indeed, **לילה** or **לילה** denotes a close association of two people, where each on regards himself as the **לילה**, the debtor, of the other, and feels that he owes his happiness to the other. Accordingly, not Leah but Yaakov **קרא שמו לוי**. It would have been presumptuous on her part, had she given the name. Coming from his mouth, however, it was the sweetest acknowledgment.

Hence, when the fourth son was born, she no longer regarded her newborn as a means of attaining a greater measure of her husband's love, for that was already entirely hers. Now she could simply rejoice in her son, and as a delighted mother she proclaimed: "This time I can thank God" just for His gift. "She therefore named him Yehudah."

Talmud bavli– Brachot 7b	תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ז עמוד ב
Ruth. What is the meaning of Ruth? — R. Yochanan said: Because she was privileged to be the ancestress of David, who saturated [Ravah] the Holy One, blessed be He, with songs and hymns. How do we know that one's name determines [one's destiny]? R. Eleazar said: Scripture says, 'Go and see the works of the Lord, Who has put destruction (shamos) upon the earth.' Do not read shamos ['destruction'], but shemos ['names']. {Thus, the name of a person reflects the purpose and essence of his soul in this world - Finkel.	רות - מאי רות? אמר רבי יוחנן: שזכתה ויצא ממנה דוד שריהור להקדוש ברוך הוא בשירות ותשבחות. מנא לן דשמא גרים? - אמר רבי אליעזר דאמר קרא: (תהלים מו) לכו חזו מפעלות ה' אשר שם שמות בארץ, אל תקרי שמות אלא שמות.

RABBI PAYSACH KROHN: NAMES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

In Judaism, a name is not merely a conglomeration of letters put together as a convenient way to refer to someone. Ideally, it is a definition of the individual - a description of his personality and an interpretation of his traits. It may even be a portent of the person's future, or perhaps a prayer that the person bearing this particular name shall live up to the potential expressed in the name.

The Torah (Genesis 5:29) relates that Noah was given his name with the prayer, "This one will bring us rest (noah) from our work and the toil of our hands." The intent was that Noah would lighten the burden of his family's toil by introducing agricultural tools (Radak).

Arizal writes that the nature and behavior of a person, whether good or bad, can be found by analyzing his name. Even the numerical value of the name's letters is an indication of the individual's character and personality.

To label something properly is to define its nature. What one may see as a rusty old spoon, another will see as antique silverware. What one may consider random scribbling, another will consider abstract art, And what one observes as a heap of scrap in a city square, another will call modern sculpture befitting a large metropolis.

Rabbeinu Bachya (on Genesis 2:19) comments that Adam revealed his great wisdom when he named all species of creation. With his superior intellect, every name that he chose, together with the combination of its letters, defined the nature and characteristics of that creature.

For example, he named the lion "Aryeh." The letters Yud-heh - which are part of the name of God, the King of kings and Ruler of the universe - represent the lion's role

