



Learning with Grandparents: What's in a Name?

As you learn together, you can ask your learning partner clarifying questions, such as:

- *Tell me more about that...*
- *What made you notice that?*
- *So are you saying X...?*
- *Can you explain that to me in your own words?*

These helpful learning prompts are from our friends at Pedagogy of Partnership



I. Nice to Meet You! What's Your Name? (20 minutes)

Before reading the verses on the following page, read the questions out loud and have everyone answer one or more. Even if some of the questions feel like they have obvious answers, you'll likely discover something new about your learning partner!

- What names are you called by different people, and who gave you each of those names?
- What does your name mean?
- If the name you are called now is not the name you were given at birth, what were the circumstances under which your name changed?



In parashat Lekh Lekha, Avram's family undergoes name changes; Avram becomes Avraham, and Sarai becomes Sarah.

Bereishit 17:3-5

Avram fell on his face; and God spoke to him, saying:	(ג) וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָם עַל-פָּנָיו וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר:
"This is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of many nations.	(ד) אֲנִי הֵנָּה בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְאָב הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם:
And you will no longer be called Avram. Rather, your name shall be Avraham," for I will make you the father of many nations.	(ה) וְלֹא-יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת-שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָהָם כִּי אֲבִי-הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְּתִיךָ:

Questions:

- Why does God change Avram's name? What is the significance of this name change?
- Can you think of other examples where God changes someone's name?

When Avraham enters into a covenant with God, his destiny is transformed. He is no longer just Avram, the individual; rather his fate is now linked to the entire Jewish people. He will be a father of many nations, in Hebrew an *av hamon*, and thus this new identity requires a new name.

After this name change, the Torah no longer refers to Avraham as Avram. The Talmud takes it one step further, arguing that it is like a commandment to only call Avraham by his new name.



Berakhot 13a

Bar Kappara taught: Anyone who calls Avraham Avram transgresses a positive mitzvah, as it is stated: "And your name will be Avraham." Rabbi Eliezer says: One who calls Avraham Avram transgresses a negative mitzvah, as it is stated: "And your name shall no longer be called Avram, and your name will be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations."	תני בר קפרא: כל הקורא לאברהם "אברם" — עובר בעשה. שנאמר: "והיה שמך אברהם". רבי אליעזר אומר: עובר בלאו, שנאמר: "ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם".
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Questions:

- Why is it so wrong to call Avraham by his earlier name? Have you ever been called by a name that you didn't like? How does that feel?
- Do you think a name change can affect a deeper change in a person's identity or how other people think of them? Can you think of any examples for that?

II. The Power to Name (15 minutes)

While you might think that God frequently names (or renames) people, there are actually very few examples in the Torah where this happens. Rather, it is much more common to see humans naming places and other people.

Let's look at one example where humans are the ones doing the naming. After God created the world, God brought the animals to Adam, to see what Adam would name them, and whatever name Adam gave them became the animal's name.

Bereishit Rabbah 17:4

Rabbi Aha said: In the hour that the Holy One came to create the human, God	אמר רבי אחא בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא לבראת את האדם, נמלך במלאכי
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<p>consulted with the angels. God said to them: "Let us make a human." They said to God: This human, what good is he? God said: His wisdom is greater than yours.</p> <p>God brought different animals to the angels and asked: What's this one's name? and they didn't know. God passed the animals before Adam and asked: What is this one's name? Adam said: This is ox, and this is donkey and this is horse and this is camel. And you, God said, what is your name? Adam said to him: I? It would be right for me to be called Adam, since I was created from the ground (adamah). And I, God said, what is my name? Adam said: It would be right for you to be called Adonai (my Lord), since you are lord to all the creatures.</p>	<p>הַשָּׂרָת, אָמַר לָהֶן (בראשית א, כו): נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם, אָמְרוּ לוֹ אָדָם זֶה מַה טִּיבוֹ, אָמַר לָהֶן חֲכָמָתוֹ מִשְׁלָכֶם.</p> <p>הָבִיא לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת הַבְּהֵמָה וְאֶת הַחַיָּה וְאֶת הָעוֹף, אָמַר לָהֶם זֶה מַה שְּׁמוֹ וְלֹא הָיוּ יוֹדְעִין, הִעֲבִירָן לִפְנֵי אָדָם, אָמַר לוֹ: זֶה, מַה שְּׁמוֹ? אָמַר: זֶה שׁוֹר, זֶה חֲמֹר, זֶה סוֹס, וְזֶה גָמֶל. וְאֵתָּה, מַה שְּׁמֶךָ? אָמַר לוֹ: אֲנִי נֹאֵה לְהִקְרָא אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָאתִי מִן הָאֲדָמָה. וְאֲנִי, מַה שְּׁמִי? אָמַר לוֹ: לָךְ נֹאֵה לְהִקְרָאוֹת אֶ-דְּנִי, שְׂאֵתָּה אֲדוֹן לְכָל בְּרִיּוֹתַיִךְ.</p>
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In this midrash, Adam is not only naming the animals, but is also naming himself and even naming God.

- According to this midrash, humans have a unique ability and power (that even angels don't!) to give names to things around them. What is so powerful about naming?
- If you were naming yourself, would it be a different name from the one you have? What would it be? Why?
- What other names do you know for God? Why does God have so many names? Do you always think of God using the same name? If not, when might you use one name or the other?



IV. Putting it all together (5 minutes)

Take a step back and take turns answering:

- Sometimes, a person's name is changed and it is a final thing, such as with Avraham and Sarah. But then, there are other times where a person has their name changed but they still keep their previous name. In what situations could you imagine each approach?
- Could there actually be something problematic about *not* using a person's first name anymore? Is there a way in which it might be disrespectful, as if it erases the person's past?

Take another step back and complete these statements:

Something new I learned (about you- my grandparent or my grandchild, or about the text), was...

One thing I appreciated about learning with you was... because...

One thing I am still thinking about is...

Want to learn more about names?

Check out the Halakhah section in Devash magazine for [Parashat Lekh Lekha!](#)

