
What's in a name?

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

A New Page of Talmud

—

Lech Lecha 5782



No longer as you to be called Abram: your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you... And God said to Abraham: Sarai your wife -- call her Sarai no more, for her name is now Sarah. – **Bereshit 17:5-6, 15¹** It is an ancient custom to change someone's name as a sign that he had received a promotion. We find this with Sarah, Yaakov, Joshua, as well as with

Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah. – **Chizkuni on Bereshit 17:5²** Also, with regard to Abraham's name, bar Kappara taught: Anyone who calls Abraham Abram transgresses a positive mitzva, as it is stated: "And your name will be Abraham" (Genesis 17:5). This is a positive mitzva to refer to him as Abraham. – **Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 13a³** Because of four things Israel was redeemed from Egypt: They didn't change their names or their language, they didn't speak negatively, and none of them were promiscuous. – **Vayikra Rabba 32⁴** Names are a book. They tell a story. The story of our spiritual potential as well as our life's mission. That explains the fascinating midrash that tells us when we complete our years on this earth and face heavenly judgment, one of the most powerful questions we will be asked at the outset is, What is your name – and did you live up to it? – **Rabbi Benjamin Blech⁵** Rabbi Yehuda says: Be careful in study, for

And you shall no longer be called...
וְלֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת־שְׁמִי
Bereshit 17:5

an error in study is considered an intentional transgression. Rabbi Shimon says: There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of monarchy - but the crown of a good name outweighs them all. – **Pirkei Avot 4:13⁶**

Would you come if someone called you by the wrong name?

I wept, because for years He did not enter my arms;

Then one night I was told a secret:
Perhaps the name you call G-d is not really His, maybe it

is just an alias.

I thought about this, and came up with a pet name

for my Beloved I never mention to others.

All I can say is- it works.

Rabia of Basra (714-801) "It Works"