



The phrase "What's in a name?" seems to imply that the name we call somebody or something is seemingly immaterial.

However, we know that name-calling can have both positive effects ("Oh, what a beautiful name!") and negative outcomes ("Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me"). In the Jewish tradition, however, our names have intrinsic meanings, and value far beyond their surface appearance.

Sefer Sh'mot opens by recording the names of those coming to Mitzrayim: Yaakov and eleven sons; in all twelve, like the constellations of the stars that bring light into a dark world (S'fat Emet). These stars are precious, insofar as Hashem lovingly accords to each a name (T'hilim 147:4). In that vein, we can think of every Hebrew name as a unique admix of Hebrew letters, like a diamond with its distinctive combination of texture, color, (spiritual) energy and potential - each treasured and counted

fervently by its fortunate owner.

Following our sages, Harav Orbach remarked that we actually own three names: The one endowed by our parents, the name others tend to call us, and the most important - the (good) name that we acquired. Of note: This notion applies not only to the individual, but also to the nation. As a nation, in exile we lose our independence and individuality; but in our own land, as free people, we can forge our destiny and our good name. It is up to us. And we might then bear in mind the prominent adage of Shlomo HaMelech: "Better a good name than good oil" (Mishlei 22:1). **MP**