

# What's in a Jewish Name

**Grade Level:** 1-12

**Time Duration:** 45 – 90 minutes

## **Overview:**

The Jewish name is very important throughout the Jewish Lifecycle and Jewish identity. Among Ashkenazi Jews (Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe), it is customary to name children after a recently deceased relative. This is a way of honoring loved one's who have died and of keeping the dead person's memory alive.

## **Abstract:**

**What's in a Jewish Name.** The Jewish name is very important throughout the Jewish Lifecycle and Jewish identity.

Among Ashkenazi Jews (Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe), it is customary to name children after a recently deceased relative. This is a way of honoring loved one's who have died and of keeping the dead person's memory alive.

When a child is formally named, either at a bris (circumcision) for boys or in a synagogue naming ceremony for girls, it is common practice to explain who the child was named for, why the child was named for that person, and what qualities of that person the parents would like to see perpetuated in the child.

Jewish names are used in prayer in and out of synagogue and for other religious rituals. When a person is called up in synagogue for an aliyah (the honor of reciting a blessing over a Torah reading), he is called up by his Hebrew name. The names that appear on a ketubah (marriage contract) or on a get (writ of divorce) are Hebrew names. When a people are ill and mi shebeirakh prayers are recited for their well-being, they are identified by Hebrew names. When a deceased person is remembered through the Yizkor prayers recited on certain holidays, the Hebrew name is used. Jewish tombstones sometimes carry the Hebrew name instead of or side-by-side with the secular name.

## **Objective:**

- A. To familiarize students with the importance of Jewish names through the many aspects of Jewish life and lifecycle
- B. To demonstrate the role of Jewish names in the grieving process
- C. To allow students to explore their Jewish names and family history

## **Materials: Handouts**

Jewish Family Names  
Jewish Family "Tree"  
Names in My Family

## **Activities and Procedures:**

- A. Read "Jewish Family Names" to the children to show them where some popular Jewish names come from.
- B. Discuss how names may have changed and that the names are special because they remind us of good times and special people.
- C. Have the children write their name in the tree and color it
- D. Have the children complete "Names in My Family" with their parents.

# Jewish Family Names

Jewish family names are very special and sometimes can tell you about things that happened hundreds of years ago. It wasn't that long ago that all people in parts of Europe (some people say the "old country") had to have formal family names. But, many names used at that time go back to much older names or nicknames.

Many family names are connected with towns and cities in Europe; some refer to the kind of work the person did; many others came from popular first names.

Here are a few sample names of the different groups:

From first names: Abraham-Abramson, Abramovitch, Abramsky, Abrahams, or how about Jacob-Jacobson, Jacobowitz, Jacobovsky, Jacoby, and many others.

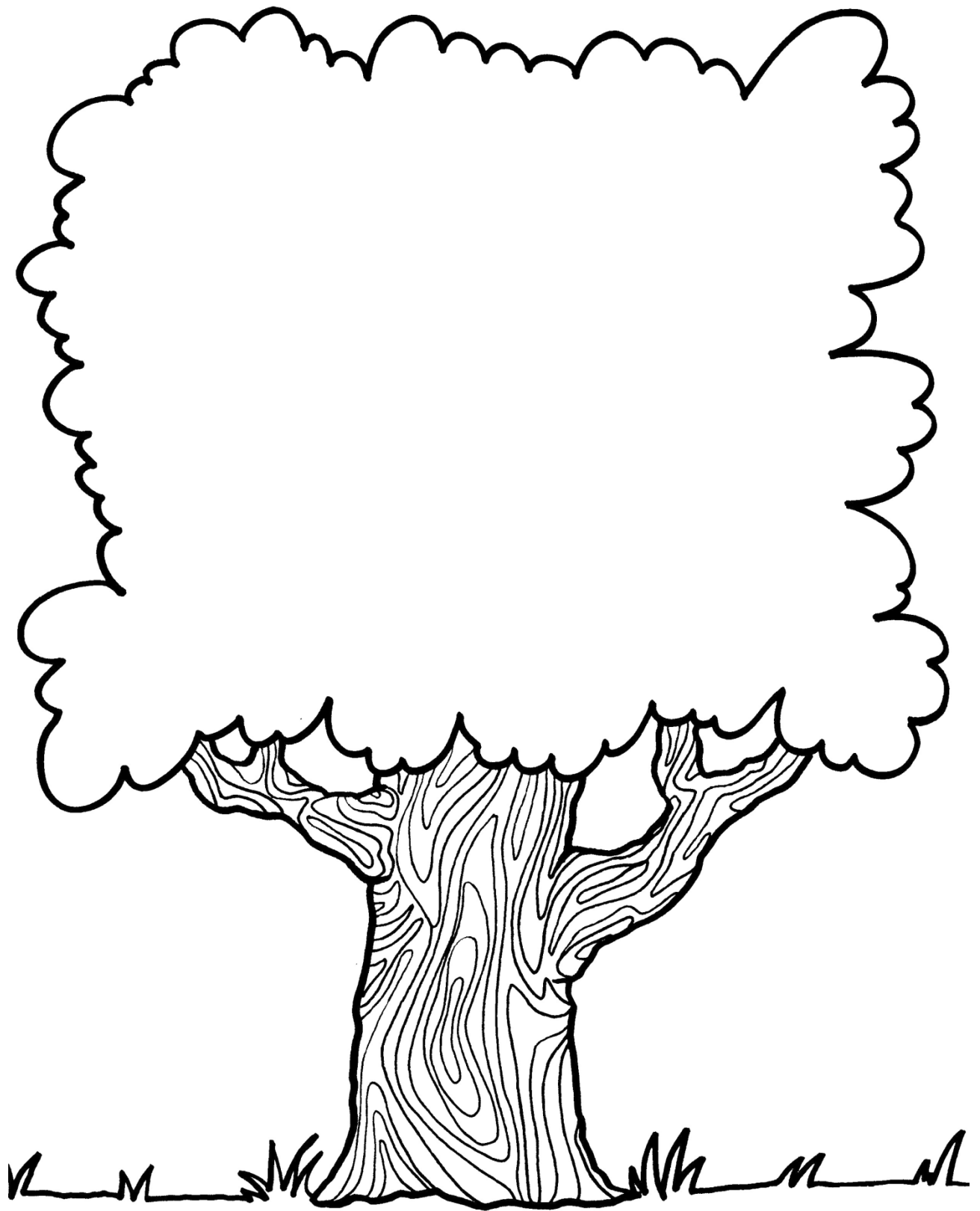
From names of cities and countries: Berlin-Berlin, Berliner, Berlinsky; Warsaw-Warshaw, Warshawsky, Warshawer; Poland-Pollack; Speyer (Germany) -Spiro, Shapiro, Sapir, etc.; Prague-Prager, and others.

From names of occupations: שוסטער (*cobbler*)-*Shūster*, Shusterman; שניידער (*tailor*)-Schneider, Snyder, Shneiderman; רבני (*rabbi*)-Rabinowitz, Rabiner, Rabin, and so on.

From Hebrew initials: Shalit, derived from the initials שלי"ט of the phrase שוחיה לארך ימים טובים [*Sheyichyeh Leōrekh Yōmim Tōvim*] *may he live long and happily*; Katz, derived from the initials כ"ץ of כהן צדק [*Kōhain Tsedek*] *the righteous kohain*.

Certain combinations were considered elegant at the time that family names became a requirement, especially those beginning with (green) גאלד (gold) גרינ (rosen) רויזן (apple) אפל (*green, gold, roses, apple*), etc.; and ending in (berg) קראניץ (mountain, flower, leaf, field, wreath), פאלד (feld) בלאט (blatt) בלום (bloom) בערג, and so on. Many of these were imposed in purely German form. From these we have family names like Rosenthal, Rosenberg, Rosenfeld, Rosenbaum, Rosenzweig, and innumerable other combinations, many of which today appear in this country in Anglicized versions. Still other names, less pleasant ones, were at that time forced upon the Jews by government officials.





# Names in My Family

My English Name:

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First Name

Middle Name

Last Name

My Hebrew Name: (*Treasure Hunter* Hint: Start at the right!)

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Name

(Start here)

Son of / Daughter of

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My Dad's Hebrew Name

and

My Mom's Hebrew Name

In the Jewish community, our Hebrew names include our parents' names. That is, I am "Rachmiel Vellvel, son of Berel and Miriam." Your Hebrew name includes the name of your father and mother, just as your loved one's name includes the names of his or her own father and mother, too!

Do you know whom you were named after? \_\_\_\_\_

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What can you find out about the person you were named after? \_\_\_\_\_

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