



Vayera: Nameless and Famous

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

Avraham sat outside his tent recovering from his circumcision. The *Bris Milah* was performed at an advanced age as the ultimate display of allegiance and commitment to God. On the third day of his recovery, the Ribbono Shel Olam, God comes to visit Avraham and performs the mitzvah of *Bikur Cholim* (visiting the sick).

Now the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot (Genesis 18:1)

The great Chassidic master, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1810), asks why the verse states, “*Now the Lord appeared to him.*” Shouldn’t it read, “*Now the Lord appeared to Avraham”? After the incredible sacrifice of the first patriarch, why not refer to him by name?*

The Rebbe provides a mystical insight and explains that the letters of a person’s name are the utensils into which his or her personalistic holiness is gathered and contained. Each letter of one’s name is a *kli* (utensil) into which one’s conferred and acquired holiness is stored. But sometimes a person can do something of such great importance or accomplish something of such great magnitude that the letters of his name simply cannot contain all their acquired holiness. After Avraham had undergone circumcision, following his departure from his homeland and way of life and then sitting in the heat of day looking for opportunities for *Hachnosas Orchim*, *hospitality*, he had become so great that the letters of his name could not contain his personalistic holiness. Therefore, the Torah omits Avraham’s name, symbolizing his self-transcendent experience. Our first patriarch had simply grown beyond his name.

The power of a name is that it often captures our essence. In fact, the Arizal explains that parents are blessed with a spirit of prophecy when they name their child as the name has to fit the character and potential of the little baby. Yet, not even the parents know who this little person is or who he or she will become.

But names can also be limiting. At times we get used to being known by a certain name and identity, and we stop trying to grow and evolve. We must maximize our name and fill its letters with holiness and accomplishment, but at times, we must transcend our names and work to become someone new. Our first patriarch changed from Avram to Avraham and then from Avraham to “him.” He had accomplished so much until no name could describe or contain his holiness.

We go through life with many names. When we are born, our parents partner with God to find a suitable name which captures our yet unknown essence. As we get older, we acquire different names. I become a son, daughter, husband, wife, father, mother, friend, brother, and sister. And as the journey progresses, I acquire different names, perhaps, reflecting my career or accomplishments. Each of these names is important and meaningful. But I must be self-aware enough to know when the name I currently carry and am known by is holding me back and limiting my self-actualization. At times, the identity of my youth is not befitting my more mature years. Too many times in life, we live with the same identity long after we have truly outgrown it. I would never wear shoes which are two sizes too small, yet I live with an identity, with dreams and aspirations which are dated and need to be updated, reevaluated, and resized. My name is beautiful, but sometimes I outgrow it. It is in those moments that I must find the courage to find a new name and potentially live with no name as I create and cultivate my new identity.