

Know Thy Name (Vaera)

The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names. -
Chinese Proverb

There is a long-standing belief in Judaism that parents are blessed with divine inspiration upon the naming of their child. God directs parents to use a particular name. Apparently, a child's name is somehow predetermined to foreshadow some fate or character trait.

The most often-used name in the Five Books of Moses is none other than that of Moses himself. Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar (1550-1619), on Exodus 6:2, claims that Moses understood the inner meaning of his name yet chose to ignore it. He claims that 'Moses' comes from the Hebrew root 'moshe' or 'moshech' meaning to draw. And that it refers not to Pharaoh's daughter drawing him from the Nile, but rather that Moses was destined to draw the Children of Israel out of Egypt.

Moses looked inward and noted that he was "heavy of mouth and tongue" (however one interprets that), and therefore inappropriate for leadership of the Jewish nation. Hence his initially declining the role God offered him. God reprimands Moses and tells him that he cannot ignore his name and his destiny and that he will overcome any and all impediments.

Moses ultimately accepts his task and destiny and becomes our redeemer, lawgiver and eternal teacher.

May we learn the inner meanings of our names and live up to them.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the memory of Yakir Hexter, hy"d.