



# Ask The Rabbi...

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*This issue is dedicated in the memory of Rebitzin Esther Golda Nusbaum O.B.M. on the Shloshim*  
**לע"נ הרבנית אסתר גאלדא נוסבאום בת ר' ישראל אייזיק הכהן ז"ל מביית קפנן לשלושים לפטירתה ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.**

This edition contains:

1. Naming the Kids
2. Readers Write: *Follow-up on the Lottery...*

Jeremy Ottenstein <Jeremy@rndjer.rndmail.rad.co.il> asked:

*I have noticed that while Ashkenazim name their children after animals, Sephardim do not. Is this just a coincidence or is there some kind of Halachic disagreement between the two groups?*

UTILAUDIT@aol.com, wrote:

*Why is it that Sephardim will name their children after living people but Ashkenazim do not?*

Dear Jeremy & UTILAUDIT,

First, some background about names. Names are labels we use to convey the essence of something. The first place we find the procedure of giving a name is when Adam names the animals, and then names Chava. The difference between this naming of animals and the naming of people is that animal names describe the species but not the individual, whereas people names describe *only* the individual. The Talmud tells us that the name given to a person can affect his character, and we are therefore careful to give our children names that will affect them positively. The Talmud also explains the verse in Proverbs "The remembrance of a *tzaddik* is a blessing, and the **name** of the wicked should rot" to mean that one should not name a child after a wicked person. Another aspect of the significance of names was told to me by Rabbi Moshe Shapiro, *shlita*, that when a child is named after someone, the child "continues in the footsteps" of the first person, in order to complete their original task.

Now, on to your questions. After investigating this subject, I agree with your distinction about animal names. Ashkenazim do, in fact, often name their children after animals, while Sephardim do not. One phenomenon that I encountered in my research is that when Rabbi Yosef Karo (a noted Sephardic *Posek*) lists the spelling of names for the purpose of writing a *Get*, none of the names are "animal names:" yet when the *Rama* (a noted Ashkenazic *Posek*) lists names for the same purpose he includes many names of animals. I asked Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *shlita*, "Why would one group choose names of animals and another would not?" He told me that really neither group is naming their offspring for animals. Since we are careful about "contaminating" our children with the *tumah* (impure spiritual effect) of non-Kosher animals. So why do Ashkenazim seemingly name children after animals? The answer is that when they name the children they are not naming them after the animals *per se*, but are recalling the qualities of the great people of early generations who are exemplified by those positive animal traits. When someone is named "*Aryeh*" (Leo, or Leonard) the trait of Yehudah is being evoked, a "lion-like" – "royal" "king of the beasts." With the name of "*Zev*" (Wolf) we are recalling Binyamin, whose character was "wolf-like – "a mighty and fearless warrior". The animals are mere **symbols** of very human qualities. "Yehuda ben Teima said: Be as fearless as a leopard, as light as an Eagle, as fast as a deer and as powerful as a lion; to do the will of your Father in Heaven."

The reason that Sephardic Jews name children after a living relative is in order to honor the one after whom the baby is named. Ashkenazim do not name their children after living relatives, because although it would be a bestowal of great honor, it would be considered an *ayin hara* ("evil-eye") for the living relative – i.e., naming the child after someone, might bring on that person's early demise. I asked Rav Scheinberg *shlita* if it would make a difference if the relative said that they are not concerned about the *ayin hara*. He said that even if they said that they are not concerned, we wouldn't do it because our assumption is that deep down they probably do really care.

Since we are on the topic of names I have a riddle for you:  
"The names of **TWO** sets of Grandfather - Grandson are mentioned in the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei*. Who are they?"

(Answer next week)

Sources

- *Bereishit* 2:20, 3:20.
- Tractate *Berachot* 7b.
- Tractate *Yoma* 38b.
- *Pirkei Avot* 5:23.
- *Shulchan Aruch*, Even Haezer 229.

Will Shulman had the following comments regarding last week's issue on The Lottery:

*My Rav in Maryland told a story about the Chafetz Chaim zt"l. "A man once asked the Chafetz Chaim for a bracha on a lottery ticket; the Chafetz Chaim refused. 'But you give brachot when people gamble on stocks, why not when they gamble on lotteries?' the man asked. The Chafetz Chaim answered that he gave brachot on stock certificates because if the stock went up, no one would lose money. But if he were to give a bracha for a lottery ticket, he would also be giving a klala (curse) to everyone else!"*

*My Rav ended by saying that while the lottery is not against Halacha, the Gedolim of Israel do not play it.*

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