



Names



What They Mean and How They Developed



JUST AS JEWS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD HAD THEIR OWN LANGUAGES, which were distinguished from the speech of the non-Jews but incomprehensible to each other, they also had names that the local non-Jews thought of as Jewish, even though Jews elsewhere might not have recognized them. Many of the same patterns of name formation can be found in widely separated and unrelated cultures, though there are a few that are distinctively Jewish. To further complicate matters, sometimes a name that was seen as typically Jewish in one area might be considered a non-Jewish name elsewhere.

Originally, in almost every society, a name had a specific meaning known to those giving the name. So, in the Bible there are many passages of the type "And

his hand was grasping the heel [*'akev*] of his brother, so they called his name Jacob [*Ya'akov*]." This pattern is familiar to us from Native American names that we customarily translate into English, such as *Sitting Bull* and *Crazy Horse*, but it was originally virtually universal. This contrasts with the way names are derived in many Western societies today, where they are frequently borrowed from foreign languages. In our society the name is just a series of sounds, and it is unusual for George or John, Mary or Alice to know the original meaning of their names.

In small communities where everyone knows everyone else and where government record keeping plays no role, people generally can get by with only a single "given" name. In more complex or larger societies they often have to add a surname (literally, "over name") in order to be distinguished from other people with the same given name. These surnames do not have to be fixed or hereditary family names, but could instead be nicknames that change from generation to generation. Throughout much of the history of the Jewish people, fixed family names simply did not exist.

In the Bible, individuals are generally identified by a single name that has a clear meaning in the Hebrew language: *Yitzhak* ("he will laugh"), *Rachel* ("ewe"), *David* ("beloved"), *Yonatan* ("God has given"), *Naomi* ("pleasantness"), and so on. If more identification is needed, this is usually provided by giving a father's name: *Moses son of Amram* (*Moshe ben Amram*), *Joshua son of Nun* (*Yehoshua ben Nun*), or *David son of Jesse* (*David ben Yishai*). Occasionally the Bible gives a whole genealogy as an identification: *Bezalel ben Uri ben Hur* or *Mordechai ben Yair ben Shime'i ben Kish*. Sometimes the tribal affiliation or the hometown is added. But nowhere is there a family name.

The lack of family names continued throughout the talmudic period and well into the Middle Ages. Great leaders, sages, and public figures continued to be described by their occupations, fathers' names, or residences but never by a family name. Such leading lights of the early rabbinic period as *Rabbi Akiva*, *Hillel*, *Shim'on ben Yochai*, and *Yochanan HaSandlar* (the sandal maker) all did without family names. *Rashi*, the great medieval commentator in northern France (d. 1105), was really named *Rabbi Shlomo the son of Yitzhak*, and *Rashi* was just the abbreviation of those names. The "Maimonides" in *Moses Maimonides* (1135–

1204) was not a family name either, merely Greek for "son of Maimon." Among Jews in the Muslim countries as well as in Italy, family names began to appear in the later Middle Ages, as shown by the names of such great rabbis as *Joseph Caro* (1488–1575), *Itzhak Abravanel* (1437–1508), and *Ovadia Sforno* (c.1470–c.1550). Among Ashkenazic Jews, family names were still largely absent in the eighteenth century. Take the examples of three famous religious and intellectual leaders of eighteenth century Ashkenazic Jewry: the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (d. 1760), founder of the Hasidic movement; the *Vilna Ga'on* (d. 1797), a great talmudic scholar and the chief opponent of the *Hasidim*; and *Moses Mendelssohn* (1729–1786), the first important Jewish Enlightenment philosopher in Germany. None of them had a family name. Even the seeming exception, *Mendelssohn*, was the son of *Mendel Sofer* (*Mendel the scribe*). Whenever he signed his name in Hebrew, it was as *Moshe Dessau* (*Moses of Dessau*), never as *Mendelssohn*.

Most modern societies, however, sooner or later, have had to require their inhabitants to take permanent hereditary family names for bureaucratic purposes. In some countries the taking of family names was relatively recent. In a few, such as present-day Iceland, family names are still not used. Instead all Icelanders have surnames ending in *-son* or *-dottir*, which are preceded by their father's given name. Among Europeans, the Ashkenazic Jews were one of the last groups to take fixed family names, in most cases between 1781 and 1835.

In their selection of given or first names, Jews could choose names of either Hebrew or vernacular origin. Even when they chose names of Hebrew origin, these often differed from region to region. Such Hebrew male given names as *Hai*, *Rahamim*, *Saadia*, *Ovadia*, and *Nissim* and female names like *Mazaltov* and *Simha* (the latter a male name among Ashkenazim) are typical of Jews of Muslim countries but are virtually unknown among Ashkenazic Jews. The names *Shraga*, *Yerachmiel*, *Shifra*, and *Basya* seem more typically Ashkenazic and are rare in Muslim countries. Even when Jews took vernacular names like those of non-Jews, they traditionally avoided names that had non-Jewish religious connotations (e.g., *Christopher*, *Mary*, and *John* in Christian countries or *Ali*, *Aysha*, and *Muhammed* in Muslim ones).

The choice of Hebrew or vernacular first names often differed by gender. Men were much more likely to have names of biblical and Hebrew origin, while women more frequently had vernacular names. There are various reasons for this. First of all, more male names are mentioned in the Bible and in rabbinic literature than female names, as women in ancient Jewish texts were often anonymous, referred to merely as Noah's wife or Lot's wife and daughters. Second, in traditional Jewish society, only men were called to the Torah, where they needed to use a "sacred" Hebrew name. Third, women were more likely to be given "pet names" whose meaning in the vernacular was well known (gold, rose, flower, queen). For these reasons, men's given names varied less around the Jewish world than did women's.

Patterns of Family Name Formation



The development of surnames, which turned into family names, tends to follow similar patterns in many countries. The four types of derivation that are most international in distribution are based on (1) the parent's name (patronymics and matronymics), (2) occupation, (3) nicknames (personal characteristics), and (4) place names. In the English language, for instance, we can find the following examples from each category: (1) Williams, Johnson, (2) Carpenter, Farmer, Smith, (3) Shorter, Black, White, and (4) Lincoln, Scott, Flanders.

These four basic categories are also to be found among Jews, though the distributions and specific examples differ widely. In the early stages, surnames were not yet hereditary. So if Jacob had a son named Abraham, that son would be called Abraham Jacobson, but if Abraham had a son named Moses, he would be called Moses Abramson. Later on the family name became hereditary, with the strange result that women can have family names like Jacobson or Ben Chaim (son of Chaim).

The patronymic, or father's name, is a very common form of Jewish family name in many parts of the world, but its specific form depends on the local lan-

guage(s) spoken in the area. Returning to the example of Abraham son of Jacob mentioned above, in Hebrew this would be Abraham ben Ya'akov. But most Jewish surnames were vernacular rather than Hebrew. Among Ashkenazic Jews who spoke Yiddish, the surname would become Jacobs or Jacobson. In Eastern Europe, where most Ashkenazic Jews lived, governments often used Slavic translations of the Yiddish surnames, so Jacobson would be written in Polish records as Jakubowicz and pronounced "Yakubo'vitch." The *-owicz* ending would have varied spellings in other Eastern European languages, including *-ovič* (Czech), *-ovics* (Hungarian), and *-ovici* (Romanian), but would still be pronounced "ovitch." German scribes might transcribe the name in the form *-owitz*. Russian officials used the Cyrillic alphabet; when Jews came from Russia to the United States, they sometimes spelled their last names phonetically in English with *-ovitch*. Some Jews in the Caucasus, Bukhara, and the Crimea were given surnames with the Russian endings *-ovitch* and *-ov* when the Russians conquered their homelands in the nineteenth century.

The name Jacobson could take many other forms as well. In Iran "son" was expressed in names with the endings *-zadeh* or *-ian*. In Georgia it was *-eshvili*; in Arabic, as in Hebrew, it was *ben* (or *ibn*) and preceded rather than followed the name. Italian Jews often used the ending *-i*, as in Abrami or Israeli. Some Moroccan Jews have names based on the Berber patronymic prefix *O-* (for instance, Ohana, son of Hanna), almost like the Irish prefix in O'Donnell and O'Malley.

Complicating the situation still further was the fact that many Jewish vernaculars (especially Yiddish) loved to give vernacular translations or nicknames for Hebrew names from the Bible and Talmud. Among Ashkenazic Jews the nicknames for Jacob were Yankel and Koppel, from which arose such family names as Yankelovich and Koppelson. Sometimes biblical names were associated with specific symbols or nicknames. Yehuda (Judah), for instance, was associated with the lion (Aryeh in Hebrew, Leib in Yiddish) and also had the nickname Yudel. This is the source of such family names as Yudelson, Leibson, Leibowicz, and Lefkowitz ("son of little Leib"). Benjamin was associated with the wolf (Wolf in Yiddish, Volk in Slavic languages, Farkas in Hungarian) from

which come the names Wolfson, Volkovich, Wouk, and so on. Naphtali was associated with the gazelle (Zvi in Hebrew, Hirsh or Hersh in Yiddish), creating such patronymics as Hershenson and Herszkowicz ("son of little Hersh"). The Ashkenazic family name Moscowwitz has nothing to do with the city of Moscow; rather, it comes from the Polish Moszek/Moszeko (little Moses). Other animals frequently referred to in Ashkenazic personal names, and later in family names, are the bear (Ber, used in such family names as Berenson, Berkowitz and, in Russian, Medved and Medvedev), the falcon (Falk, Sokol, Sokolovsky), and the eagle (Adler).

Sometimes nonbiblical Hebrew names would be translated into the vernacular and then develop further. Yechiel and Chayim (both based on the root meaning "life") were called Vives and Vital in medieval France, which developed into the Yiddish names Feivush and Feitel. A Moroccan Jew named Ben-Hayim once told me that he had said to his Ashkenazic neighbor, Mr. Feitelson, "We have the same last name"—both names mean "son of life." Another example of two names based in part on patronymics that mean the same thing, though they don't sound at all alike, are the Ashkenazic Rabinowitz and the Iranian Akhamezadeh, both of which mean "son of a rabbi."

Among Ashkenazic Jews, matronymics derived from a mother's name are more common than they are in most societies, which seems surprising given the usual view of Jewish culture as patriarchal. A number of possible explanations for the development of matronymics exist. In some cases, the father had already died; in others, as was common in Eastern Europe, the mother ran the business. In still others, the mother was simply a more memorable person than the father. Examples of matronymics among Ashkenazic Jews are Sarason (son of Sarah), Rifkin (from Rivka [Rebecca]), Chanin (from Chana), Beilis (from Beila), and Goldenson (son of Golda). Some names could be derived from mothers' names or from a different source. For example, Rosenson could derive from roses or from a mother's whose name was Rose. Perlmutter could come either from someone who worked with mother of pearl or from someone whose mother was named Pearl.

Names based on occupations are quite common among Jews, though generally less so than those based on parents' names. A few of these names are derived

from Hebrew, like Chait (tailor), Melamed (teacher), Hazan (cantor), and Katzoff (butcher), but most are derived from the vernacular. For that reason, Jewish names in various parts of the world do not sound related even when they have the same meaning. Among Ashkenazic Jews, the most common trade immortalized in family names is that of the tailor. Besides Chait, mentioned above, there is Schneider (from German or Yiddish, sometimes Americanized to Snyder), Kravitz (from Polish Krawiec), Kravchik (from Ukrainian), and Portnoy (from Russian). There are also many roundabout ways of including the tailoring profession in a family name. Examples of this are Nadelman or Nudelman (needleman), Sherman (from Yiddish Sher, "scissors"), and Fingerhut (thimble). Other trades found in Ashkenazic Jewish names are butcher (Fleisher, Metzger, Katzoff, Reznick), glazier (Glass, Glazer, Sklar), tinsmith (Blecher), blacksmith (Schmidt, Kovalsky), furrier (Futterman, Kirshner, Peltz), and scribe (Sofer, Schreiber).

Similar patterns but very different sounds are found among Jews in other parts of the world. In Arab-speaking countries, there are Abitbol or Boutboul or Teboul (drummer), Abulafia (doctor), Alalouf (seller of fodder), Almozeg (glazier), Asayag (goldsmith), Siton (wholesale grain dealer), and Tabib (doctor). In Iran the name Hakimi (doctor) seems to be typically Jewish.

The third category, nicknames based on personal characteristics, seems somewhat less common among Jews than are the first two categories. Some examples of Ashkenazic names of this type are Schwarz (black), Klein (small), Roth (red), Graubart (graybeard), Geduldig (patient), Dicker (fat), and Schoen (good-looking). It has been humorously suggested that all Hungarian Jews were named Weiss (white), Schwarz (black), Gross (big), and Klein (small) because the government officials picked names at random. Some Arabic examples are Assouline (noble), Elkyess (smart), and Tawil (long or tall). Some Italian Jewish ones are Pacifici (peaceful, a translation of Shalom) and Rossi (redhead). Sephardic family names from nicknames include Azulay (blue), Caro (beloved), Castel (castle), Cordozo (hearty), Esformes (beautiful), Galante (galant), and Pardo (brown).

The final category, found in many different cultures, derives from place names. This type of name is more common among Jews than among most other cultures for a simple reason: Jews were more likely to move from place to place,

either because of persecution or because of business opportunities, than were farmers, who were the majority in most societies.

Some Jewish names are easy to trace because they come from well-known cities in the same region where the family lived. Among Ashkenazic Jews, some obvious examples are Berliner, Minsky (from Minsk), Prager (from Prague) and Vilner (from Vilna). Frankfurter, Hamburger, and Wiener (from Vienna) also derive from city names, not names of deli foods. Often the same city can give rise to different family names. So Warsaw gives the names Warschauer (the German form) and Warszawski (the Polish form). For Pinsk, there is Pinsky and Pinsker; for Vilna, Vilner and Wilensky. In other parts of the world, the cities after which Jews are named are naturally different. In Iraq we might find Bagdadi and Basri (from Basra); in Iran, Tehrani, Isfahani, and Shirazi; in Arab countries names like Alfasi (from Fez), Masri (from Egypt), and Adni (from Aden). Sometimes Jews imported their names from the "Old Country." So Jews in Morocco or Syria or Turkey could be named after cities in Spain: Toledano (from Toledo), Cordovero (from Cordova), and Alkalay (from Alcala). Some names are surprising, like the Ashkenazic names London (common in Eastern Europe) and Schottlander (literally Scot, but actually deriving from Altschottland, a suburb of Danzig).

Place names are commonly used as Italian Jewish family names. Many names derive from small Italian cities, such as Bassani (from Bassano), Castelnuovo, Finzi (from Faenza), Modigliani (from Modigliano), Sinigaglia, and Viterbi (from Viterbo). Others were imported by Jews immigrating from other countries. From southern France came Lattes and Foa (Foix in French). Many Ashkenazic Jews settled in Italy in the sixteenth century and later and often Italianized their place names of origin. So, many Italian Jews were named Morpurgo (from Marburg), Ottolenghi (from Ettlingen), Luzzatti or Luzzatto (from the region of Lausitz or Lusatia), Treves (Trier in German), Tedesco (German), or Polacco (Polish).

Among Ashkenazic Jews, some of the most widespread names come from very obscure places. Among the first Ashkenazic Jews to take family names were rabbis proud of their family origins. Many of their names derive from relatively small localities. The ancient Jewish community of Speyer on the Rhine is the origin of Shapiro and Spiro. Others took their names from the small towns named

Günzburg (the origin of Ginzburg) in Bavaria, Eppstein in Hesse, Heilbronn (from which comes Halpern), Hořovice (origin of Horowitz) near Prague, Landau which is south of Speyer, and even Katzenellenbogen, on the Rhine northwest of Frankfurt. The city of Trier, from which Italian Jews acquired the name Treves, also gave Alsatian and southwest German Jews the name Dreyfus. Some Eastern European Jews ended up with Italian-derived names like Padwa and Rappaport (from Porto).

Some names came from countries or regions. Ashkenazic Jews often had names like Deutsch (German), Ungar (Hungarian), Litvak (Lithuanian), Pollack (Pole), Russ (Russian), and even Spanier (Spaniard), Franzos (French), and Italiener (Italian). Regions represented include Franconia (Frankel), Hesse (Hess), Silesia (Schlesinger), and Swabia (Schwab). Some of these names are found mainly outside the country from which they derive. Most Deutsches lived in Hungary, not Germany. There were Sarfatis (French) in Italy and North Africa and Eskenazis (Germans) in Greece.

The four patterns mentioned up to now are shared by Jews and non-Jews. There are, however, several forms that seem specifically Jewish. The first group is made up of tribal and priestly names like Cohen and Levy and their derivatives. In Italy the name Sacerdote (priest) was a typically Jewish name, the equivalent of Cohen in other countries. Among Ashkenazim these names often have alternative forms. For Cohen (spelled many different ways, including Kohn, Kohen, and Cohn), there was the Aramaic equivalent Kahan or Kahana, with various spellings. Another form based on Cohen or Kahan is Kahn (which also means "rowboat" in German). Sometimes the idea of priesthood was "translated" into the vernacular in forms like Kaplan (literally, "chaplain"). In the Russian language, which has no *h*, the *h* was written down as a *g*, creating such forms of Cohen as Cogen, Kagan, and Kagana. For Levy there are such fancied up forms as Levitt, Levine, Levitus, and Löwy.

A widespread equivalent of Cohen—Katz—introduces a new category of names that seem to be found almost only among Jews: names derived from abbreviations. This form is especially easy for Jews to create because the Hebrew language writes only the consonants and uses diacritical marks for the vowels.

Therefore a string of consonants can be pronounced by the addition of vowels that do not have to be written. Katz, which means “cat” in Yiddish but has nothing to do with felines, is an abbreviation of Kohen Tzedek (righteous priest). KTz was pronounced as if it contained the vowel “a.” The name Katz could also be expanded to form Katzman, Katzenstein, Katzenberg, and so on.

There are many other names that derive from abbreviations, especially among Ashkenazic Jews. These include Babad (son of the chief rabbi—Ben Av Bet Din), Barash (Ben Reb Shmuel or Ben Reb Shlomo, son of Samuel or son of Solomon), Bril (Ben Reb Yehuda Leib, son of Judah Leib), and my favorite, Shalit (Sheyichye Leorech Yamim Tovim, “may he live many long days”).

Invented Names



You may have noticed that the discussion of Jewish names has so far left out some of the most common American Jewish names. These belong to one of the more important categories of family names among Ashkenazic Jews, a group which is of relatively recent vintage. These names, which Jews took on order of the government, signal an extremely important change in the status of Jews in the Western world. Until the eighteenth century, Jews in most of the world were dealt with by governments more as a collectivity than as individuals. They lived under special laws that differed from those of other citizens and were governed by the Jewish community, which assessed taxes, judged internal disputes, and regulated daily life. Governments often assessed global taxes on the entire Jewish community of a town and left it to the Jewish leadership to decide how much each family should pay. Bureaucratic functions for which governments today keep track of individuals and their vital statistics—taxation, education, the military draft, welfare—were either handled by the Jewish community or did not apply to Jews. Therefore the government was not disturbed by the fact that most European Jews did not have family names.

This situation began to change in the eighteenth century. First in Germany

and France and then in other European countries, governments began to implement a policy of integrating the Jews instead of segregating them, as they had done previously. Jews were brought under the general law of the state, Jewish communal bodies lost their governmental powers, and Jews were promised that if they proved worthy, they would be granted the full rights of citizenship. In almost every region, one of the first conditions for granting the Jews new rights was that they take permanent family names in order for the government to monitor them, as they were already monitoring their non-Jewish subjects.

In most countries, Jews were given three to six months to choose a permanent family name. In a few places, such as Galicia, they were told that the government would choose names for them. Some governments put restrictions on what names Jews could choose, excluding names of noblemen in some places and in others forbidding Hebrew names or typically Gentile names. Within these restrictions the Jews had a choice. One can imagine the dilemma that many European Jews faced when they learned of the requirement to choose a family name quickly, a name that would now accompany all their descendants. Many Jews simply took the patronymic, nickname, or place name they had been using previously and registered them as their family names. Others, however, either because they did not have or did not like their nickname, made up new names. These newly invented names, known in German as *Modenamen* or “fashionable names,” were generally combinations of words that seemed beautiful sounding at the time. It’s easy to imagine them putting together names from various words by picking “one from column A and one from column B.”

<i>Column A</i>	<i>Column B</i>
Rosen- (roses)	-berg (hill)
Blumen- (flowers)	-thal (valley)
Gold-	- man
Loewen- (lions)	-baum (tree)
Fein- (fine)	-wasser (water)
Silber- (silver)	-blatt (leaf)
Schoen- (beautiful)	-stein (stone)

From Rosen- they could create such names as Rosenberg (rose hill), Rosenthal (rose valley), Rosenman (rose man), Rosenbaum (rose tree), Rosenwasser (rose water), Rosenblatt (rose leaf), and Rosenstein (rose stone). Almost every imaginable tree (and some that are purely fantastic) became the source of a Jewish family name: Appelbaum (apple tree), Birnbaum or Barenboim (pear tree), Kirschenbaum (cherry tree), Kestenbaum (chestnut tree), Eichenbaum (oak tree), Flumenbaum (plum tree), Tannenbaum (fir tree), Lindenbaum (linden tree), Feigenbaum (fig tree), Teitelbaum (date tree), and even Goldbaum (gold tree) and just plain Baum. There was often no requirement that members of the same family choose the same last name. So two brothers might chose completely different names (like Schoen and Lang, for instance), while many people who were unrelated could independently choose to be named Goldberg.

Since the Russian alphabet lacked an *h*, an entire series of doublets was created, which are really the same name: Hendler/Gendler, Horowitz/Gurevitch, Galpern/Halpern, Heller/Geller, and Hirshenson/Gershenson. In some Yiddish dialects the *h* was dropped, as in Cockney English, so Halpert became Alpert and Hungerleider became Ungerleider. Sometimes an *h* was added where it didn't originally exist, resulting in Helfand/Gelfand/Elfant, which all mean "elephant."

Because the permanent family names were imposed as part of centralization and modernization by European states, they never became completely "naturalized" in traditional Ashkenazic society. This differs from the situation in Sephardic Jewry, in which family names have been around for hundreds of years and still have official Jewish status. Many non-Ashkenazic Jewish groups, but no Ashkenazic ones, use the family name for calls to the Torah: "Ya'amod hashem hatov kevod rebi Moshe Toledano" ("the honorable Mr. Moshe Toledano is called to rise to come to the Torah"), whereas Ashkenazim still use the ancient "Moshe ben Shmuel" ("Moses the son of Samuel"). In an East European synagogue "Ya'amod Moshe Shapiro" ("Moshe Shapiro is called to rise to come to the Torah") would have seemed odd indeed. Not only were family names not admitted into the religious service, many people simply didn't use them in daily life. To greet Moshe Shapiro on the street, you would say in Yiddish, "Sholem Aleichem" or "Gut Morgn Reb Moshe" ("Hello, Mr. Moshe"), using the first name only. In

fact, many shtetl dwellers were unaware of their neighbors' last names since these names were used only to deal with the government. Moshe Shapiro might very well be known to his neighbors by such nicknames as *Moyshe Shloyme dem Bekers* (Moses the son of Solomon the baker) or *der hoykher Moyshe* (tall Moses) rather than as Shapiro.

The Jewishness of Names



The hereditary family names that did become standard throughout the Jewish world were sometimes distinctively Jewish and sometimes not. Germany is full of non-Jewish people named Gross, Schwarz, Klein, Mayer, and Zimmermann. Similarly, Poland has Kowalskys, Russia has Medvedevs and Sokolovs, and the Ukraine even had a president named Kravchuk. Other names seem Jewish because they are common among Jews but are shared by some non-Jews, such as Jacobson, Löwenstein, and Hamburger in Germany. Even a "typically Jewish" name such as Rosenberg was shared by the notorious Nazi Alfred Rosenberg, who didn't have the slightest hint of a Jewish background. Both a Jew and a non-Jew could, of course, be named after the same place, occupation, or personal quality. Some names, which are typically Jewish in one area, are not considered Jewish at all in others. No one in Norway or Sweden assumes that Mr. Jacobson is a Jew. Krause is a typically non-Jewish name in Germany, but in eastern Europe it is a typically Jewish one.

Often the local population knows what is a typical Jewish name even if to an Ashkenazic Jew it does not sound Jewish. This is the case of many Italian names derived from place names. A former student of mine named Viterbi told me that when a flight attendant on Alitalia heard his name, she immediately replied, "Oh you're Jewish!" To a North African, Ben-Soussan or Kalifa sound like typical Jewish names, but Goldman and Rosenfeld sound German. Sometimes we infer a Jewish connection from a patronymic, so we would guess that Eliashvili was a Georgian Jewish name but that Dzhughashvili (Stalin's real family name) was not Jewish. But this method of determining the Jewishness of a name is never certain.

Even though, in the United States, one way to estimate the Jewish population is to see how many names appear on the "List of Distinctive Jewish Names," this is far from a foolproof method.

Further complicating the idea of Jewish family names is the fact that many Jewish families have changed their original names. In some cases this was done purposely to conceal or at least play down one's Jewishness, as when Kohen became Kovacs in Hungary, Brownstein became Brown, Goldberg became Graham, and Schewelewitz became Smith in the United States. The list of Jews in the theater who took less distinctive stage names is almost endless: in Germany, Max Goldmann became Max Reinhardt; in the United States, Judy Tuwim became Judy Holliday, Isser Danilevich became Kirk Douglas, and Bernie Schwarz became Tony Curtis. Only in contemporary America has the trend been reversed, with a non-Jewish actor helping her career by changing her name from Caryn Johnson to Whoopi Goldberg.

Name changes were not necessarily the result of a desire to assimilate. Often they were simply a by-product of emigrating to a new country. There are many stories and jokes about the names given to Jewish immigrants at Ellis Island, including the old joke about the immigrant who picked a new name and forgot it. When he got to the official who asked his name, he said in Yiddish "Shoyn fargessen" ("I already forgot"), whereupon he emerged as Sean Ferguson. Very often immigration clerks did not have the patience to write down the long and seemingly unspellable names of the immigrants. They simply wrote down Shereshefsky as Sherman, Matyevitz as Matthews, and Galeshevsky as Goldberg. Often they seem to have decided that "I can't spell it but they're Jewish; so I'll call them Cohen or Greenberg or Halpern." Many an American Jewish family no longer knows its original family name.

A similar thing happened in Israel, although there changes were often made for more ideological reasons. Zionist ideology believed in the rejection of the Diaspora and the substitution of Hebrew for the old Jewish vernaculars. Therefore, new immigrants were encouraged to Hebraicize their original names. Many of the leaders of the new Jewish state had new Hebrew names different from their birth names: David Ben Gurion (originally Green), Levi Eshkol (originally Shkol-

nik), Golda Meir (originally Meyerson), and Zalman Shazar (originally Rubaschoff). At one point in Israel's history, members of the diplomatic corps were required to Hebraicize their name. Many Israelis translated their original names or picked names that sounded vaguely similar. Lowenstein would be translated as Evenari (lion stone) or Avenary or changed in sound to Lavi. Steinberg would become Har Even (stone hill); Goldberg, Har-Paz (gold hill); Gartner, Ginat (garden); Benaya, Ben-Naim, and Schoenberg, Shen-Har (the first part sounding like Schoen and the second part translating *-berg* into Hebrew).

Despite the relative recentness of Jewish family names and the fact that many names have been changed in recent times, names continue to be seen as a sign of Jewishness by many people. For some, changing one's name to hide one's Jewishness seems a more serious denial of Jewish attachments than such violations of traditional religious law as eating pork or doing business on Saturday. In a small number of cases, children have gone back to the original family name given up by their parents or grandparents. The authors of *The People's Almanac*, by Irving Wallace and David Wallechinsky, are actually father and son (Wallace is the father and Wallechinsky is the son). Part of this phenomenon is related to the revival of ethnicity and the search for roots that is a part of contemporary American (and Israeli) culture. In an ironic way, this return to original names, revival of ethnic identity, and search for attachment to the past are the flip side of the process of assimilation and the loss of roots. It is only now, when the organic ties to the past have been weakened by modernity, that the search for roots has become a widespread pursuit.

Names continue to be a shorthand way to identify people with an ethnic group, even in our multiethnic, highly mixed contemporary society. They are still used by scholars doing studies of ethnic populations and by members of the group searching for others who share their background. Although family names are certainly no foolproof way of determining who is a Jew and who is not, they are still a convenient marker used by both Jews and non-Jews to tell (or at least guess) if a person is Jewish. They continue to remain the marker of a Jew (in many cases), even when the original source and meaning of the name have long been forgotten, even by the bearers of the names themselves.