

Rabbi David Wolpe's

# *Off The Pulpit*

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## **What's In A Name?**

The Hebrew book of Exodus is called "Sh'mot," names. Yet the first extended story, about the slavery from Egypt, records none of the names of the Egyptians save for the midwives, Shifra and Puah (although some commentators claim them as Jews, it seems clear the Torah intends them to be taken for Egyptians.) Even Pharaoh is a title, not a name — one of the reasons it is so difficult to determine which Pharaoh should be associated with the time period.

A society where names are not known is a totalitarian state. Names grant individuality, personality, and a certain status. "Do you know my name?" is another way of asking, "Am I distinguished in your eyes?" In the story of the Tower of Babel, no names are given, for there was a collectivity without individuality. Wisely was the museum in Israel entitled "Yad V'shem" — because the quote from Isaiah, 56:5, "a place and a name" means that each one lost was a unique soul.

The crown of a good name, teaches Pirke Avoth, is the greatest of all crowns. In a graveyard, whatever other inscription a stone bears, it invariably records the deceased's name. Tyranny seeks to erase names. Memory and love restore and preserve them.

Am I An E-Slave?

Passover: Matzah, En Route To Freedom