

What is a Name?

By William Rabinowitz

**A good name is more desirable than great riches;
to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.**

Proverbs 22:1

Regard your good name as the richest jewel you can possibly be possessed of - for credit is like fire; when once you have kindled it you may easily preserve it, but if you once extinguish it, you will find it an arduous task to rekindle it again. The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear.

Socrates

Greek philosopher in Athens (469 BC - 399 BC)

Living in the second fastest growing Jewish community in America is always interesting.

It gives me pause to think. w.r.

What is a name? A personal name, a family name, a nick name, an identifier, a cognomen, a forename, a moniker, an appellation, a pseudonym, a code name, a noms de guerre, or a nom de plume, a symbol, a title, a destination, a designation, a image.....

Call a person a *Jew* in Boynton Beach and you have a fight on your hands. Ask a person, *are you Jewish*, no problem, except for those Jews who don't want to identify with the tribe. They prefer last name like Jones, Smith, Jackson, anything but Cohen. If they respond *yes* then ask them, with a smile and a shoulder shrug, *then you are a Jew?* Don't go any further and ask *what is the difference between being Jewish and being a Jew*, the only thing you will get is a disgusted look and maybe a punch in the nose.

Names are important in Boynton Beach, where you live and the correct address is vital. Few Boynton Beachers will admit that they are just as happy living in Boynton and not having a Boca Raton address. Boca is the *hoighty toighty* place to be. Boca houses tend to be nicer but older. Their lawns are greener. Their illegal immigrants get paid more to keep their lawns handpicked and their hedges trimmed nicer than in Boynton.

I actually know Jews who have purchased overpriced houses in gated communities, West Boca, Near Boca, Almost Boca, and Boca View, just to have a Boca address. They hold their noses higher than the rest of us. They have the famous New York restaurant, Ben's, glatt kosher, recognized by the local Vaad de Rabanim, complete with a *hechsir*. Ben's is open on Shabbat and the Jewish holidays because they sell it to a goy for that day. It is so nice to get a hot matzoh

ball soup or an extra lean corn beef sandwich after Shabbat services. One of these days I will have to tell them that Boca Raton is Spanish for *Mouth of the Rat*.

Boynton is named after Major Nathan S. Boynton, a Union civil war soldier from Port Huron, Michigan. He came to Boynton Beach in 1894, two years before Henry Flagler built his railroad opening up south Florida. It was only a year earlier, 1893, that the last *Barefoot Mailman*¹ ceased walking the 136 mile mail route that traversed the Boynton Beach between Lake Worth to the north and Palm City to the south. Chances are the mailmen stopped walking the route as one of them might have been eaten by an alligator will trying to swim across a stretch of water delivering his mail.... Through wind, snow, and gators the mail must go through....

Enchanted by the pristine beaches, plentiful local fruit produce and warm climate, Major Boynton returned a year later with a bunch of Michigan colonists. They built the Boynton Beach hotel². Major Boynton was tired of the cold winter weather in Michigan; his arthritis was acting up, his lumbago lumbagoed. Recognizing a golden coconut when he saw it Boynton and his investors built the beach area's (soon to be named after him) first Snow Bird Paradise. Flagler's railroad made it easy for northerners to fly south for the winter leading directly to the great Florida Land Boom bust of the 1920's³. Everyone up north bought in South Florida --- they bought the myth, real estate only goes up.

Boynton Beach is sandwiched between the Atlantic Ocean and the beginning edges of the Everglades ten miles to the west. It remained a sleepy little beach town until the 1970's. Boynton was too far North from Miami where Jews were allowed and too far south from trendy, upscale Palm Beach to the where the Jews were not allowed.

Norman, our dog, the wife and my little bit of Boynton Beach live an un-gated community called Piper's Glen. It is not for over 55 year olds exclusively or non-gated intentionally. They call restrictive communities for people over 55, that's a sort of place for geezers or those rapidly becoming geezers, active adult communities. Pipers Glen never became a no kids welcome community because the place has never sold out – something about the builder holding lots for a tax shelter. The entrance to Piper's Glen Estates has a central island area big enough for a guard house and plastic semi-automatic barrier arm but no one wanted to pay for the 24/7 guard – so we are a non-gated open, caring community that will welcome all – preferably over 55 and without kids.

How they chose the name Pipers Glen is a mystery. The name associates images of Scottish highlanders parading up and down the glen in their heavy wool red tartan kilts wheezing away on the crying bagpipes. The very thought brings grimacing shudders of the terrible heat rash he probably developed in his private areas under all that wool in the summer parading up and down in Boynton Beach's hot humid spring, summer and autumn days squeezing his bag pipe. Was the builder Scottish – actually he's a Cuban who escaped Castro. There is no glen or anyone named Glen who lives here.

There are over thirty five active adult communities in the Boynton area⁴. Most are gated to keep undesirables out and possibly keep the confused in, to the great relief of their children up north.

In the Old Testament, the names of individuals are meaningful; for example, Adam is named after the "earth" (Adam) from which he was created. (Genesis 2) Boynton Beach's active adult communities have all sorts of names mostly for the same reasons. For example, Avalon – connotes King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. I guess most of the people living there are more interested in picking up a butter knife than a six foot sword and rushing out to slay dragons.

Water is a big part of a community's name. Cascade Lakes, Coral Lakes, Royal Lakes, Tivoli Lakes, Valencia Lakes. Most of the lakes in Boynton are not natural. They are huge pits that were dug out during construction and filled in with non-potable water – not even the local water birds go there. But the 55 and over crowd eagerly pay extra for a house with a view of the water and their neighbor across the lake eating his morning corn flakes staring right back at you.

If you don't have a lake or lakes then put a water fountain in or perhaps some artificial rocks and create bubbling waterfalls. You can call your active adult community the Cascades, or Mizner Falls. Don't have falls or a cascade or lakes, being near the edge of the water works Palm Shores, Tuscany Bay or Valencia Isles. One Boynton Beach community is called Boynton Waters – now that can be taken two ways. Most likely it was intended to mean they built lakes there using the Boynton Beach water system and not a reference to the most popular Boynton Beach CVS Drug Store supply – adult depends. O.K. so if you don't have a lot of artificial lakes, name yourself the Grove after a beautiful orange tree grove that you plowed under to build your Levitt styled cookie cutter houses. Or maybe you could be honest and call yourself Pine Tree Village – south Florida is famous for scrub pines.

My favorite community is actually just north of Boynton on Jog Road. You can't make this up. Considering that Florida is joked about as being God's waiting room, how could anyone name a community Journey's End? I know for a fact that they have not changed the requirements to live there to semi-active adults over 75 who are still breathing schlepping portable oxygen tanks.

There is a penchant here for Italian names, Valencia Lakes, Valencia Isles, Valencia Shores, Bellagio, Tuscany Bay, Tivoli Lakes, Tivoli Reserve, Ponte Vecchio, Ponte Vecchio West. The New York Jews seem to be attracted to them. I guess that is why one of the famous Boynton Beach bagelries, New York, New York is directly across the street from Valencia Isles and Bellagio.

Jews have always gotten on well with the Italian community. In Italy, Jews have lived for over two thousand years. Mussolini forgot that fact when he called for the removal of all Jews, from the balcony of his Roman Villa. He called Jews, undesirables interlopers who had only been there a few years and had no history in Italy. Problem was that Mussolini's Villa was built on top of land that had been a 2000 year old Jewish cemetery.

Jewish tourists visit the Forum's triumphal Arch of Titus in Rome commemorating the destruction of the Second Temple and the sacking of Jerusalem by the Roman Legions. For millennia Jews would not walk through the towering arch with its carved images of the Menorah and Temple treasures being carted away by the plunderers. We do today. Shortly after the

victorious rebirth of the State of Israel a contingent Jewish soldiers from the IDF, the Israel Defense Forces, marched tall, and strong through that very Arch with reborn pride and dignity.

Jews like Italian food hence the Italian marketing names. We love Chinese food even more but have you ever seen an active adult community named Fung Shwei Estates, or Ho Chi Fat Lakes. Why not Jewish names like Beth Torah Hills, or the Children of Israel Dunes. In Boca the Jews go running to live in exclusive St. Andrews Country Club. So why wouldn't non-Jews be happy to live at King David Gardens... sounds like a cemetery project.

"In the ancient world, particularly in the ancient near-east (Israel / Palestine, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia) names were thought to be extremely powerful and to act, in some ways, as a separate manifestation of a person or deity. This viewpoint is responsible both for the reluctance to use the proper name of God in Hebrew writing or speech, as well as the common understanding in ancient magic that magical rituals had to be carried out "in [someone's] name". By invoking a god or spirit by name, one was thought to be able to summon that spirit's power for some kind of miracle or magic.

The Babylonian Talmud maintains that names exert a mystical influence over their bearers, and a change of name is one of four actions that can avert an evil heavenly decree, that would lead to punishment after one's death. Rabbinical commentators differ as to whether the name's influence is metaphysical, connecting a person to their soul, or bio-socio-psychological, where the connection affects his personality, appearance and social capacities. The Talmud also states that all those who descend to *Gehenam* will rise in the time of Messiah."⁵

The Jewish community of Boynton Beach has ordained their houses of worship with all sorts of meaningful names. They all invoke some special Jewish or Hebrew sounding quality to identify themselves as being Jewish. Fortunately Jews are pragmatic especially in South Florida. We understand that if we did not permit driving to Shul on Shabbat almost no one would attend. Jewish seniors know they will meet God in the relatively near future. They just don't want to meet God sooner than they need to by dropping dead on the six mile hike to and from their personal house of worship. Even the Boynton Beach Chabad on El Claire has an extra large parking lot. Except for those fortunate few who moved across the street from the Chabad shul, into the active adult, over 55 senior community of Majestic Isles, many seniors have to drive.

Temples are the nom de guerre in Boynton; Temple Torah, Temple Shaarei Shalom, Temple Beth Shalom, Temple Ami, Temple Dor L'Dor. You have to wonder if they thought about the names much. We are the Temple of Torah – no one else is, or we are the Temple of the singers of Peace while another proclaims we are the Temple of the House of Peace. Wrong others say, we are the Temple of the People and another we are the Temple of Generation to Generation – I must admit can't go there, it's my own stuyot⁶. Florida is still God's waiting room and I have no intention of passing anything any sooner to another generation than I have to.

Why can't Boynton Beachers simply name a Jewish house of worship the way the Jews did in Albuquerque, New Mexico, *Congregation Alfred*? The Albuquerqueians needed money to build their synagogue. A guy named Alfred gave the most money so they named the place Alfred.

When it was dedicated the Governor, the Mayor, Alfred and a marching brass band were in attendance.

It is hard to say if I would be comfortable attending a synagogue named Harry and Sarah's House of God. Sometimes I think the Christians name their churches more logically, St. Marks, St. Luke's, St. Johns, The Pentecostal Church of God, The Church of the Redeemer are much more direct and clear. Does the Moshe Rabenu House of God, or Abraham, Isaac and Jacob worship center work? To be fair and non-sexist in our politically correct contemporary culture we should expand that to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, Leah Jewish egalitarian Torah Emeth Shaare Kadosh welcoming House of God.

The automobile and driving on Shabbat gives us the freedom to go outside of Boynton Beach in search of God. We can go find God in Boca or Del Ray or West Palm. We can pray at Congregation Shaarei Kodesh and claim the title of holy singers, or even more traditionally at Congregation B'Nai Israel and say we are the Children of Israel. A bit of caution is still needed when going to look for synagogues. The Golden Lakes Temple is o.k., the Loc Uyen Temple is not. Congregation Anshei-Emuna (the People of Faith) and Temple Emeth (the Temple of Truth) are o.k. even if it is suggested that the attendees of the People of Faith would never be caught dead in the Temple of Truth. New comers to the area need to be aware that the Melech Yisrael Congregation (King of Israel Congregation) or the Ayts Chaim Congregation (Tree of Life Congregation) are not traditionally Jewish. They are Jewish-Christian Messianic. It is quite a ways outside of traditional Judaism for Jews to wear tallesim, and don tephillin while singing the praises of Jesus. In Boynton we have a lot of ways to God – it all depends on what flavor you are interested in to keep you busy before actually getting to meet God.

Meeting God is something we all get to do eventually. Yidden,⁷ feeling poorly, having gorged themselves at the Fountain's Emperor Chu's after Shul lunch buffet on spareribs and beef chow mein, need not to worry; chances are that the medical building and your doctor is just across the street on Boynton Beach Boulevard. The overpaid doctor you complain about all the time who not so eagerly accepts your Medicaid reimbursement of \$6.27 to prescribe your medication sends you a bit further south down Jog Road to the Walgreens drug store to get it filled. If you have the grave misfortune not to recover from Emperor Chu's but expire, all is not lost. Well, it may be lost for you but for your family, things are not so bad. The Beth Israel Memorial Chapel is on the corner across from the Walgreens. Beth Israel (the House of Israel) memorial chapel, what happened to L'Chaim? I prefer a name like Cohen's Memorial and Farewell Chapel. Names get so mixed up in Boynton Beach.

Funerals are in fact a difficult and emotional time. We say goodbye to our loved ones and mourn their having been part of our lives. Those that passed have passed so really the bereavement process is meant for us. A final dignified act is required by Jewish law. We are obligated to bury our deceased with dignity and respect. Some Jews here choose cremation, not the traditional Jewish way. The very thought bring goose bumps and images of Nazi furnaces. I recognize that cremation saves a lot money for the children to inherit.

Cemeteries in have problems, in Florida, you can't really dig six feet down. The water table is too high. Wood coffins float – truly a problem. Some Jewish cemeteries use open air

mausoleums stacked six rows high. The upper floors are cheaper even with the better views. The solution for traditional ground burial is to use a concrete liner and backfill. The Jewish cemetery takes care of all of the details even deeding the family a particular piece of land that Uncle Sidney or Aunt Harriet is resting in. At least we thought so.

I am sure that the situation is now fixed and will never happen again.

Headline from the St. Petersburg Times⁸, "Settlement near of desecrated graves. FORT LAUDERDALE - Circuit Judge J. Leonard Fleet said he would approve a \$100-million settlement against two Menorah Gardens cemeteries accused of desecrating graves.

The cemeteries in Broward and Palm Beach counties had been accused of burying people in the wrong places, breaking open vaults to squeeze in other remains and, in some instances, tossing bones into the woods."

It turns out that the site the kids were sending flowers to, from the Boynton Beach FTD store every Yahrzeit, may not have been mom after all. Their distress and concerns have been addressed now with financial remuneration thanks to the caring Jewish lawyers who sued Menorah Gardens.

"The Babylonian Talmud maintains that names exert a mystical influence over their bearers, and a change of name is one of four actions that can avert an evil heavenly decree, that would lead to punishment after one's death".

"Menorah Gardens was re-named Star of David Cemetery and Funeral Chapel of the Palm Beaches Sunday morning in a ceremony."⁹

Norman and I go for our daily walks with a smiling lilt and his plastic poop bag on my belt just the same. You can't make this stuff up.

A nice young man once wrote:
*'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;*

[Romeo and Juliet \(II, ii, 1-2\)](#)

Story from the [Boynton Beach Chronicles – Tails of Norman](#)

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He can be commiserated with at amzhs@hotmail.com

¹ <http://www.boyntonbeach.com/history/mailman/index.html>

² <http://www.boyntonbeach.com/history/bbhotel/index.html>

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida_land_boom_of_the_1920s

⁴ Incomplete community list:

Avalon, Boynton Waters, Cascade Lakes, Cascades, The Club at Indian Lakes, Coral Lakes, Coronado Estates, Country Green, the Enclave, the Grove, Grove Isle, Hampton Lakes, Indian Spring, Lakeridge, Lakeridge Falls, Madison Lakes, Majestic Isles, Mizer Falls, North Point, Palm Chase, Palm Chase Lakes, Palm Shores, Pine Tree Village, Piper's Glen Estates, Platina, PonteVecchio, Ponte Vecchio West, Royal Lakes, Sandhurst, Sausalito Place, Sun Valley East, Tivoli Lakes, Tivoli Reserve, Tuscany Bay, Valencia Isles, Valencia Lakes, Valencia Point, Westchester, Wyndson Estates,

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name>

⁶ Hebrew - sillyness

⁷ Yiddish for Jews

⁸ http://www.sptimes.com/2004/10/27/State/James_Eaton__lauded_F.shtml

⁹ http://www.wptv.com/news/local/story.aspx?content_id=92459f77-a2df-417a-b427-b14caa74d29e