



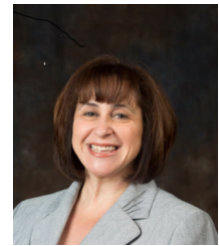
## Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

# Today's Torah

*Jews have always been a community drawn together by virtue of Torah. No matter where you may be, we welcome you to the Ziegler community through Today's Torah e-mail.*

**Shabbat Lekh Lekha**  
**October 20, 2018 - 11 Heshvan 5779**



**By: Rabbi Cheryl Peretz**  
**Associate Dean**  
**Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies**  
**American Jewish University**

## It's All in the Name

Torah Reading: [Genesis 12:1 - 17:27](#)  
Haftarah Reading: [Isaiah 40:27 - 41:16](#)

*(A version of this message will appear in the Table for Five column of the Los Angeles Jewish Journal. To read other thoughts on this topic, visit their website [www.jewishjournal.com](http://www.jewishjournal.com)).*

In one verse, this week's Torah portion reminds us of the great significance the Jewish tradition places on names: "And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham for I make you the father of many nations." (Genesis 17:5)

With the addition of just one letter, at the age of ninety-nine, Abram becomes Abraham and his transformation to the father of many nations is confirmed. At the same time, Abraham is not the only biblical figure whose name is changed. Sarai becomes Sara; Jacob becomes Israel. Joseph, Joshua and Esther all experience name changes. From these models, a long-standing custom emerged to introduce a name change after a grave illness or other life-changing moment.

So important is choosing a name that rabbinic midrash teaches that when parents name a child, they experience a small piece of prophecy for from one's name comes his/her destiny. We are born into a

particular family with a particular history and with a particular set of parents who hold hopes and dreams for our future. As one is named, so too is his/her reputation. This is, what is meant in the Book of Samuel “Kshem ken hu – like his name so is he.” So, Ashkenazic Jews name children after those no longer living, while Sephardic Jews name children after the living – both hoping and praying that each child will be endowed with the positive traits and strong image as the one for whom she/he is named.

In the end, we create our own name by what we do in the world, the way we act, the people we touch, the values we manifest. It is up to each one of us to be worthy of the name we have been given – to create a good reputation, to live in kindness, compassion, and commitment, and to remember the lesson of the book Ecclesiastes: “A good name is better than fragrant oil.”

Ken yehi ratzon – so may it be.

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**Rabbi Cheryl Peretz**, is the Associate Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, where she also received her ordination. She also holds her MBA in Marketing Management from Baruch College, and helps bring those skills and expertise into the operational practices of rabbis and congregations throughout North America.

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Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies  
American Jewish University  
15600 Mulholland Drive  
Bel Air, CA 90077  
310-440-1218  
[www.aju.edu/ziegler](http://www.aju.edu/ziegler)

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