

Librarian's Lobby

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Hebrew Name Statistics

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Last month I wrote about name pairs that have a Yiddish and Hebrew part. The May article listed 21 male name pairs and six female name pairs. This article will put some context to the names with an analysis of the names from one synagogue.

Nature of the list

Members of the synagogue supply their Hebrew names for the purpose of being called to the Torah. Other family names are supplied for the *mishebarach* prayer after an *aliyah*. For each member the card includes the person and as applicable wife, children, parents, wife's parents and sometime sibling. For children of members, the cards include the person's name, parents' names and if applicable sibling and grandparents' names. An individual may be on multiple cards. We have many three and a few four generational families. Since we have a few members older than 80 years old a few of the names could belong to people named more than 140 years ago. Names from deceased members are also included.

Names are listed as person ben/bat father's name. The mother's name is in parenthesis. For example: (אברהם רפאל בן יוסף דוב (רבקה). Since a person may have one, two or three given names, the count for this list may include six names. To prevent skewing of the data an individual's name is only included once. That means if a person is Avraham ben Yosef and has a father Yosef ben Shmuel, I record Yosef only once.

Orthography

The Social Security Administration gathers names from card applications. They do not interpret or change spellings of similar names. This means Deborah and Debra are two different names in their listing. They assume that parents can spell the names as they see fit. I could not use this methodology. The spelling of Yiddish names and regular Yiddish words is fluid. The spelling is influenced by the country of origin or accent of the speakers. Yiddish spelling is closely related to the pronunciation. YIVO tried to standardize spelling, but this is a topic for another time and place. For example (Leib and Laib) לייב ו ליב are the same name. When pronounced in the United States they are almost the same. In Europe the form with two yods (twei yoden) has a longer vowel sound. Some people tried to copy the Yiddish spellings of the ancestor. Some people did not know how their ancestor spelled the name and used a spelling that sounded like they remember. Some people used a Hebraicized version for the spelling a Yiddish name. For purposes of these statistics, I standardized the spellings and fixed obvious misspellings. That means לייב and ליב are the same name in my list. But לב Lev is Hebrew and not the same name even though the pronunciation is very close.

For the name Beila there were at least five ways to spell the name in Hebrew letters. Since I was not sure if בילה is the same I counted it separately.

Shayna, Shandel, Shana, and Shany שיינדל שיני are variants of the same name. I decided to count each separately.

Two names, Bat Sheva and Ben Zion are usually spelled as two separate words. However, some parents spelled the names as one word for example: Batsheva and Benzion.

Statistics

The sample size is 3691 names. The number is the total number of names represented, not the number of people. If there are 100 people named, Yosef that would add 100 names to the sample size count. There are 473 unique, unduplicated names; 242 are female and 232 are male names.

Even though the names are the Hebrew ritual or legal names they are not all from Hebrew roots. In the list below “multiple languages” is the same as the Yiddish Hebrew name as I wrote about in May’s *Librarian’s Lobby*. The most popular name pair is Yehudah Leib.

Language Of origin	Number of Unique names	Sample size
Aramaic	14	36
Hebrew	283	2986
Yiddish	143	597
Multiple languages	16	59
other	15	15

Most of the names in the “other” languages are from the Greek. Names such as “Todros” and “Alexander” have long been given as Jewish names. Fifty-three names are theophoric that is a name with part of God’s name in it (such as Daniel and Shmuel).

10 most popular names as defined by number of occurrences.

Name	sample
יעקב	188
משה	132
חיים	122
אברהם	105
יצחק	98
דוד	83
צבי	78
יוסף	69
ישראל	66

שרה	66
Total in sample	1007
Percentage of all the names in top 10	0.272826

The next 10 most popular names

שמואל	48
שלמה	49
רחל	65
מרים	56
מרדכי	51
מאיר	60
לאה	58
חנה	66
זאב	46
אהרון	47
Total in sample	546
Percentage of all the names top 20	0.420753

The least popular names

Names with one owner 206 Names with two owners 56
Names with three owners 39 Names with four owners 25

I am not going to list these names because of privacy protect of the individuals. Some of the names are from Yiddish and some are very “modern” sounding Hebrew names.

This is an analysis of only one synagogue. While name frequency varies by geography, community, and stream of observance this list is the only one that I had full access to. It represents people who were born in many parts of the US, Europe and Israel and is hopefully representative.

Daniel D. Stuhlman is president of **Stuhlman Management Consultants**, Chicago, IL, a firm helping organizations turn knowledge into wisdom. We are looking for new clients and opportunities. Visit the web site at Stuhlman.info to learn more about knowledge management and what our firm can do for you. Previous issues of Librarian's Lobby can be found at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~DDStuhlman/liblob.htm>. [E-mail author](mailto:author). Last revised June 9, 2009