

Naming Children After The Living



Names should only be a happy topic that elevates us and serves as a connection to the souls of great members of the Jewish people, not a source of strife and cause of Machloket. There are many laws and customs regarding the names we give our children. Some are meant to maintain peace between the families, while others have the well-being of the child in mind.

1. Generally speaking, Ashkenazim do not name children after living people^[1] for fear of shortening the other person's life^[2] or to avoid violating a living parent's honor by calling the child the same name as the parent in his presence. Sephardim are not concerned because they see it as a zechut for the living and the baby, and they either call the child by a term of endearment instead of his actual name or the parent is Mochel on his Kavod.^[3]
2. Rav Moshe writes that if there is no reason to pick a particular name, even Ashkenazim are advised to choose the name of one of the Neviim or a recognized Tzaddik and genius of our times, even if he's still alive. Even if the namesake is not a Torah personality, there is what to gain. Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv named his third child, a daughter, after their childless neighbor as an act of kindness to uplift her gloomy spirits!^[4]
3. Sepharadim in general have the custom to name children after living relatives as an honor and merit for the relative, starting with the father's parents and then the mother's, unless there are additional factors such as a loss of the mother's parent, in which case the paternal grandfather's Mechilah would be needed. This was the case with first son of Rabbeinu Yonah's daughter and the Ramban's son, because Rabbeinu Yonah passed away before his daughter gave birth and the Ramban instructed his son to name the boy Yonah after his maternal grandfather to preserve his legacy.^[5]
4. If one is naming after both parents (such as to appease everybody), the name of the paternal father should come first.^[6]
5. Even by Sepharadim this Minhag is not ubiquitous. In Morocco and Iraq, specifically, they would not name after the living, while in Algeria and Tunis, they would. Some say that if the living relative gives permission, it's nevertheless ok in any location.^[7]
6. In the case of a mixed marriage, where the mother of the baby's family does allow it, but the father's does not, the baby may be named for its mother's living family members.^[8]
7. If the child is the product of a broken marriage, some recommend not naming the baby for members of either family to avoid aggravation from the opposite side.^[9]
8. Ultimately, every family should follow its custom.^[10]

Sources

1. Sefer HaChassidim 460
2. Yehuda Ya'aleh (vol. 2 Even HaEzer, [Choshen Mishpat 106](#); [Yoreh Deah 246](#))
3. Sdei Chemed (Chattan veKallah 5), Chelkat Yaakov [Yoreh Deah Siman 136](#), Aseh Lecha Rav 2:57, 6:69
4. Iggerot Moshe ([Orach Chaim 4:66](#)). See Minchat Elazar vol. 4 Siman 27, Beis Yitzchok 5747 pg. 5. HaShakdan vol. 3 page 182
5. Rashbash 291, Yabia Omer vol. 5 Yoreh De'ah 21, Yalkut Yosef (Sova Semachot vol. 2 10:2)
6. Ben Ish Chai (Shanah II Shoftim 27), Yalkut Yosef (Sova Semachot vol. 2 10:3)
7. Netivot HaMaarav pg 139, Nahagu Ha'Am Shonot 7, Ateret Avot vol. 3 pg. 80, [HalachaYomit.co.il](#)
8. Yabia Omer vol. 5 Yoreh De'ah 21, Yalkut Yosef (Sova Semachot vol. 2 10:4), Shalmei Simcha pg. 458
9. Chashukei Chemed [Gittin 26b](#)
10. Shaarei Halacha uMinhag vol. 3 Yoreh Deah pg 297