

“Known for our Relationships, Known for Ourselves”
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I am often surprised that my husband doesn't have an identity crisis. There are so many times when people call him not by his name, but in relation to my name. They call him “Mr. Rabbi Judy,” or “Mr. Schindler.” When in reality his name is Chip, Chip Wallach.

I got a taste of his reality when I went to eat his restaurant this past Wednesday. I went to reintroduce myself to the cashier, whom I had met only once, and she said, “I know you, you're Mr. Chip's wife.”

I have never been called that before. Being called “Mr. Chip's wife,” immediately made me think of all the Biblical women who have no name.

There is Noah's wife, who accompanies him on the ark with a zoo full of partnered animals for nearly half a year, yet still she has no name. She is known simply as *eshet Noach*... the wife of Noah. In fact, she is mentioned five times in the narrative and never is named.

There is Lot's wife who couldn't move forward from Sodom and Gomorrah without looking back and therefore turned into a pillar of salt. She likewise has no name. She is known simply as *ishto* – his wife.

There are times when all of us are known only in relation to others. We are someone's daughter or son. We are someone's brother or sister. We are simply someone's parent or spouse. Hopefully, for most of us, being known in relation to our family members is good thing and source of pride rather than a source of shame.

Then there are times we are known by our own names. Today in our Torah, in Parashat Pinchas, we have such a case.

We have five daughters of man named Tzelophchad. In an unusual style for the Torah, all of these women's names are given: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They approach Moses and the entire assembly saying, “Our father died in the wilderness and left no sons. Let our father's name not be lost. Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!”

While prior to this in the Torah only sons could inherit land, Moses and God hear their plea, see their case as just, and amend the law forever so that the land of a father, who has no sons, will be transferred to daughters. By giving their own names, their father's name is not lost.

The truth is, most of us are known by our relationships. We are known by our relationship to our congregation: “Oh you're a member of Temple Beth El,” people will say. We are known in our relationship to our community of faith: “Oh you are Jewish,”

others will remark. We are known in our relationships to our friends and family, to our neighbors, to the alumni of the school from where we may have studied.

Yet just as clothing does not make the man, so do our associations not make a person. We make ourselves. Like the daughters of Tzelophchad, we are given a name we stand up for something. When we speak. When we act. When we care.

Up until this week, like many of the Biblical women, Michael Jackson's daughter, Paris, had no public name and no public face. She was hidden from the community's eye. She was simply one of Michael Jackson's children. But this week, at his memorial service, she was given a name and face and a place in some of our hearts as she cried her tears of grief.

About each of us as children and about our children finding their own path in life, the famous Arab Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran wrote

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday...

(Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet)

We are all children of our parents and of God. Our task is to pave our own path in the world, making a name not only by those with whom we connect, but by who we are and what we do.