



THE FIRST GIFT

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As a boy relates the first gift his parents gave him, his name, he recounts how names came to be and considers the many names a person may be called.

The *First Gift* uses the Bible's King David to teach us that we are all different names to different people. King David (whose name means "beloved" in Hebrew) was the second king of the united Kingdom of Israel, and his life story is recounted in First and Second Samuel and First Kings. His death and the ascension of his son Solomon to the kingship are described in Second Kings.

While there is no source to say that King David's brothers called him "useless," as they do in *The First Gift*, many of the other names used to describe King David in this text are accurate. He is known to have had red hair, to have been a musician, and to have had a strong liking for the slingshot, as demonstrated in the famous story of David and Goliath.

JEWISH NAMING TRADITIONS

As the book's endnote mentions, there is a strong Jewish tradition to name children in memory or in honor of other people. Think back to how you chose the name for your child. Does your child's name honor someone dear to you? Does the name reflect qualities that are important to you? If possible, make your child a keepsake that shows the significance of the name you chose. Collect photographs and stories about the person for whom your child was named. This will be a lovely gift to give to your child when s/he is old enough to appreciate it.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Young children often enjoy hearing about their family and their connections to other people. If your child is named in memory or in honor of someone, begin telling stories to your child about that person. If your child isn't named for a person, tell your child why you chose the name you did, what attracted you to the name, and what it means to you. You can also turn the question around to your child: ask why stuffed animals or imaginary friends have the names they do. If your child has a Hebrew name, explain what the name means and/or why you chose it; various Internet sites can translate names for you, as can many Jewish baby name books. Encourage friends and relatives who have Hebrew names to share them with your child so they can begin to see that others have more than one name.

As your child gets older, you can think together about all the names we answer to, including the names we are called in our family, by our friends, at work, etc. Your child might enjoy thinking of all the names s/he can be called and hearing the names you enjoy being called. This is an important exercise to continue as your child grows, not only to hear the names that develop but also to teach that people are more than the names we call them: your teacher may also be a son, a father, a best friend; the crossing guard might be a grandmother, an artist, a singer or a comedian! Pj