

Hey you....No, no, no, you, you. No, no, no...you I mean, you! Uh (in frustration). Do any of you know who I was talking to? Clearly I was having trouble connecting with the person I was speaking to. Why was that?

Good evening. My name is Maya Elana Bellas and my speech tonight answers this question...The importance and meaning of a name, specifically my Hebrew name.

My given names, Maya and Elana were chosen for me by my Eema and Abba for many different reasons. First, my parents were looking for names that could be easily pronounced in English, Hebrew, and Russian. They wanted my names to be the same in all three of our family languages. Maya and Elana fit this need.

Ka'eitz shatul al mayim yatzli'ah

He will succeed like a tree planted near water. Psalms 1, verse 3

Maya and Elana were two names that my parents liked very much. However, these names have much more behind them than fitting in three languages and being liked. The pasuk that I just quoted was an inspiration for my parents. What is the connection?

This piece of artwork, which my parents had made for my *simchat bat* baby naming, tells the story of my names as well as I ever could...Have a careful look and you will see a tree planted near a stream of water.

My first name Maya means “water.” Now, you may be surprised to hear that since many of you know that the Hebrew word for water is MAYIM. Well...TA DA...my name is actually in the language of ARAMAIC, which is why it is spelled in the very unique way of MEM YUD ALEF.

Elana is one of the Hebrew words for “tree.” It is spelled with an ALEF in Hebrew and an E in English. The ALEF and the E were taken from my great-Zaida Eddie’s names in Hebrew - ARON - and in English - EDWARD. I am named after my Zaida Eddie to honor his memory and keep his spirit alive.

Names are not just words on an attendance list or in a phone book. They represent the wishes and hopes that parents have for their children. In my case, the names Maya and Elana capture the memories and cultures of my family and the dreams that my parents had for me when I was born. That’s why my names are significant and meaningful to me and why I hope never to be called with the words “HEY YOU!” THANK YOU.