

Recording Genealogical Data *

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1. General

In the present and the following chapters I will outline a procedure for recording data by the researchers of Jewish genealogy, especially those engaged in Rabbinic genealogy. This procedure is also useful in writing texts and correspondence on the subject. It does not aim to enforce a rigid genealogical recording system, but to suggest some common rules, already used by many, in order to simplify the recording and to render it widely understandable, as well as to help the newcomers to genealogy and the less experienced. The suggestions are based on my long experience with a large database of persons of all kinds. The entire procedure has been described in several short installments in *Sharsheret Hadorot*, Vol.16, No.4 (2002) to Vol.18, No.1 (2004).

There is no technical reason that prevents us from having the records in Latin fonts rather than Hebrew ones. There is only the sentimental reason. Since we are dealing with Jewish genealogy it would seem more natural to conduct the recording in Hebrew. For many practical reasons, however, such as the wide international connection, the management of the records in Latin fonts is easier, and it does not tarnish in any way the records. Moreover, in all genealogical software there are some extra unused fields, or fields that do not relate to Jewish genealogy. I shall refer to these fields as *free fields*, and they may be converted and used by those who wish to include the Hebrew spelling of the names, or for any other purposes, as will be pointed out later.

2. Notations

After these general remarks, the following notations are suggested whenever applicable:

1. R' for "Rabbi" or "Reb," like R'Yehuda, R'Yekutiel etc., which is generally useful in correspondence. The notation R. used by some for the same purpose, can be mistaken for an initial of a given name or a middle name.
2. b' for "son of" or "daughter of" like Yehuda b'Shmu'el or Beile b'Yitzchak. It is from the Hebrew "ben" or "bat," a very convenient use of the same notation for both genders.
3. m' for "from" designating the location where the person is from, like R'Aharon m'Karlino or R'Pinchas m'Korets. It is also from the Hebrew "me" which translates "from," and is very useful to designate persons, mostly Rabbis but not only, from the time that surnames were not in common use and one way to differentiate between persons with the same given name was by the location.

It is suggested that the three notations, which are always followed by a name of a person or location, be used without a space between the notation and the name, in order to avoid separation between the notation and the name at the end of the line.

3. Names

The recording of names is the critical point of genealogical record keeping, particularly if your database is a large one, say over 500 entries (persons). The accessibility of your data depends on the logical recording of names. We encounter several problems with names.

a. Surnames. Take the name KLAUSNER. What would be its equivalent Hebrew spelling? I spell my name, together with many others, קלוזנר, my brother spells his name, also with many others, קלוזינר, my cousin and many others spells his name קלאוזנר. These are the common spellings. However, there are other spellings. My late father used the Yiddish spelling קלאוזנער. But קלוסנר and קלאוסנר can also be found today.

The opposite case is similar. How would you spell in English the Hebrew name קלוזנר if you saw it? KLAUSNER, KLOISNER, KLOSNER, KLAUZNER, CLOISNER, KLAUSSNER, etc.?

It is believed that the name SCHWARZ, originally "black" in German, may be spelled in 28 different ways. I think that the combinations of its spellings are even more.

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On the other hand, when you work with genealogical software you want to have the possibility to reach, say, all KLAUSNERS when prompting only one name in your software and not having to prompt several variations of the name. **In general, it is wise to use the “easiest to remember” variation of the name.** For instance, if the name is originally German, I use the German version i.e. SCHWARZ, WEISS (not WEIS, WEISZ, WAIS, etc.), BAUM (not BOIM, etc.). However, the anglicized version of WEISS, which is WHITE, I record as WHITE although its origin is the German WEISS.

Always use your common sense and best judgment.

Consequently, the rule should be: **use minimum spelling variations throughout.**

If we want to preserve the original spelling of the name of the person the way he himself used to spell it or the way we found it in the source, there is always the possibility to record it in a “free field,” assigned for this purpose.

Women should always be listed by their maiden surname.

Each genealogical software has its own rules on how to record surnames. These rules should be followed. Some software requires recording them between brackets, or between slashes, or as upper case, etc.: [Klausner], /Klausner/, KLAUSNER, etc.

If the surname is not known, it should be recorded as the rules of the specific software require. [Unknown], /Unknown/, UNKNOWN, etc.

b. Given names. The problem in given names is somewhat similar. To illustrate it:

Isaak, Icek, Icchak, Isik, Eisik, Ajzek, Icyk, Itzik, Itsig, Izsak, Isik, Yitzchak, Itzchak, etc. are all various spellings of the name יצחק in Hebrew. So are Chane, Chanzie, Chana, Hanna, Hanah, Hanche, Chantse, Annie, Ann (occasionally), etc. various spellings of the Hebrew name חנה. See the problem raised by Pickholtz (Pickholtz 2002).

In all these instances, and many others, use **one** most familiar or easy to remember name for all the variations, say, Isaak or Yitzchak, Hanah or Chana or any other variation. Here again, you have the option to record in a “free field” the name actually used by the person, or any other name by which he or she are known.

If the given name of a person is not known the word Unknown or Unidentified should be recorded.

Some persons were given two names that usually go together like Yehuda Arye, Yisachar Dov, Yechiel Mechl, Benyamin Zev, etc. Others were given pairs of names in memory of grandparents from both sides or in honor of one’s revered Tzadik or for other reasons: Yakov Chayim, Meshulam Zushia, Chaya Sara, Rivka Rachel, Yakov Yosef, Zvi Elimelech, etc., or still other pairs where the second name is the Yiddish equivalent of the first or some “kinui” derived from the first name: Arye Leib, Zvi Hirsh, Efraim Fishl, Shmuel Shmelke, Shlomo Zalman, etc.

In the case of pairs of names or multiple given names, it is a custom not to invert them or change their order.

c. “Tribe.” Among the Jewish people we recognize three “tribes”: Kohen, Levi, and Israel. The affiliation to any of these tribes is passed by birth through the male line, from father to son. The tribe affiliation, if known, can be recorded after the name as: Kohen, Hakohen, Levi, Halevi, Israel, or identified like [K], K*, [L], L*, [I] and I* respectively: Simcha RAPPAPORT Kohen, Pinchas HOROVITZ Halevi, etc. If the tribe affiliation is not known, the identification mark should be omitted.

There are certain families that are known to belong to a specific tribe. The RAPPAPORTs, SHAPIRAs, KATZs RABINOVITZs, etc. are known to be Kohanim. The HOROVITZs, HELLERs, RUBINs, etc. are known as Leviim and the ENGLMANs, for example, as most of the Jewish people, are Israel. However, it is to be remembered that **the name alone is by no means an indication of the tribal affiliation.**

4. Location Names

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a. Locations (b,m,d). All genealogical software has fields for recording birth, marriage and death of persons. It is desirable to find and record the respective locations available as well.

Persons were driven out of their locations or moved around from one location to another to provide for their family, to study or due to other circumstances, and lived sometimes in three or more locations. Some software provides a large field where all locations can be listed. If not, again a “free field” can be used for that purpose. The years that the person spent at each location can also be recorded.

It should be noted that before people acquired surnames in the late 18th century and even later the location was occasionally contained in the name of the person. They were known by their given name, related to the location they came from: R’Avigdor m’Bilgoraj, R’Avtalyon m’Modena, R’Avraham m’Prague, R’Avraham m’Leczna, etc., among others to distinguish between persons carrying identical given names.

b. Spelling. The recording of location names is most ticklish. Many locations have several names that have changed and rechanged in the course of history. Entire regions changed hands from Polish to Russian to German to Austro-Hungarian to Ukrainian, from German to French, from Hungarian to Slovakian or Romanian, etc. and consequently locations changed their name as awarded by the sovereign country at that time. We find all of them in the literature as well as in everyday usage. Bratislava (Slovak), Pressburg (German), Pozsony (Hungarian) are names of one and the same location. So are Grosswardein (German), Nagyvárad (Hungarian), Oradea (Romanian) or Aix-la-Chapelle (French), Aachen (German). Moreover, the spellings found would vary widely while used by persons of different national background. Aleksandriya, Aleksandria, Aleksandriia, Aleksandrija, Aleksandrya, Ayzpute are the names for Aleksandrja in Wolyn, or Chenstchov, Chenstochov, Chenstokhov, Chestokhova, Tshenstokhov are the names for Chestochowa in the Kielce gubernia, or Daugapils, Daugava, Dinaburg, Dunaberg, Dunaburg, Dvinsk, Dwinsk are the names Daugavpils in Latvia, etc.

To this it should be added that in the literature as well as in the daily language the Jews used sometimes Jewish names for certain locations. Deutschkreuz (in German), Nemetkeresztur (in Hungarian) was known as Zelem (Yiddish-Hebrew); Rzeszow (Polish) was known as Reisha (Yiddish), and others also in a variety of spellings.

c. Namesake locations. There are also names, specifically in Poland, but also elsewhere, that are carried by two or more locations like Bereznica (Polesie gub.) and Bereznica (Wolyn gub.); Bielsk (Bialystok gub.) and Bielsk (Warsaw gub.); Janow (Kielce gub.), Janow (Lwow gub.) or Janow (Tarnopol gub.); Leszno (Poznan gub.) and Leszno (Warsaw gub.); Nowe-Miasto (Lodz gub.), Nowe-Miasto (Poznan gub.): Nowe-Miasto (Lwow gub.) or Nowe-Miasto (Warsaw gub.) and many many others.

In addition to the aforementioned problems we have with location names and in addition to the variety of their spelling, location names are also unintentionally distorted by *phonetic spelling* both in printed and in spoken forms, as perceived by the people. See also a recent publication on misspelling (Fibel 2003).

d. Methods of recording locations. To confront that maze of spellings our means are quite limited. The lists that are available, are limited in extent or relating to a limited region, or extensive and confusing since they do not discern between locations with similar names. Most of us do not even know what the correct spelling of the location we are looking for is. We are also limited in the sense that there is no one criterion to choose from the many spellings the locations assumed through history.

One of the criteria might be, spelling the localities as they are known today. Another criterion is that started by “Yad Vashem,” where the spelling of localities used is the spelling used in 1939 before World War II.

Only a few lists that can be used, are known. Among them are “*The Black Book*” (Yad Vashem 1965) that contains names of localities whose Jewish population was exterminated by the Nazis,

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and the more recent encyclopedia published by YIVO (Weiner 1994, 1997). A. Holzman published in her website <http://www.zchor.org> a list of locations (1578 locations) of Poland, "We Remember" edited by A. Klevan. There are other lists of locations limited in extent and for a particular region or country like the recent work containing a list of locations in Lithuania (Lerer-Cohen and Issroff 2002) or the list of locations of the Austro-Hungarian empire (Cohen 1997) or locations in Transylvania (Cohen 1989) and others. On locations in Transylvania it is worthwhile to consult also the Hungarian Government website

<http://www.hungary.com/corvinus/lib/transy/transy26.htm>

e. Consistency. There is no way, at this stage, to require researchers, and certainly not to enforce, the use of any particular system or spelling but they are strongly advised to use one and the same system and spelling throughout their own database.

5. Dates (b,m,d)

a. Importance of Dates. Although dating and dates are one of the most important features of genealogy, much of the data we obtain from various sources are without dates.

The most important and frequently recorded dates are the dates of birth, marriage and death (b,m,d), which are received from family recollections, from official documents that attest the event, or from tombstones.

Less important dates, nevertheless helpful, are dates that link the person to a specific event like the conferring of a title, position or degree on the person or the date of his ordination, which allow placing the person in a limited time span.

There are several ways to distinguish between persons with the same given names before surnames were bestowed on them and even after that. Those are the given name of the father, the surname, the location they lived and operated in, their trade, their writings and the dates. From all these characteristics, sometimes only the dates may distinguish between the persons. Take for instance the Ostroger Hassidic dynasty. The founder of that dynasty was R'Yacov Yosef 1 b'Yehuda Arye Leib d.1790. His son who succeeded him was R'Elyakim Getz 1 d.1824. R'Elyakim Getz 1 was succeeded by his nephew R'Yakov Yosef 2 b'Pinchas d.1849. His son was R'Elyakim Getz 2 d.1885. His first cousin was again R'Yakov Yosef 4 b'Moshe whose son R'Elyakim Getz 3 d.1895 followed. There was a R'Yakov Yosef 3 b'Avraham in between and the names Yakov Yosef and Elyakim Getz continued but then they already assumed surnames. If we would not have the dates of death we would not know which R'Elyakim Getz b'Yakov Yosef's daughter married R'David b'Yitzchak TWERSKI d.1919 or which R'Elyakim Getz is the father of R'Arye Leibush b'Elyakim Getz LIEBERSON, of R'Alter Mordechay b'Elyakim Getz or of R'Yakov Yosef 5 b'Elyakim Getz. This is not an exceptional case; there are many similar ones, but it is a well-documented case to refer to.

Not only are the dates themselves important, attention must be given even to small differences in the dates and one must not consider them to be inaccuracies. When I received once a list of children's names and dates of birth of a family, it matched almost exactly the names and the dates of a family that I already had in my database. The slight differences in the names lead me to believe that they are alternatives to the names I had and the differences in the dates a result of inaccuracies due to erroneous recollection and misrecording. It turned out that they were two separate families of cousins, the fathers being brothers who gave their children names after the same deceased uncles and other elders of the family.

b. Common Era Dates and Jewish Dates. We are interested to record both the Common Era dates and the Jewish dates. With the Jewish dates of particular importance is the date of death. People tend to remember and cherish the date of death, the "Yahrzeit," of our loved ones and the "Yahrzeit" date is specified by the Jewish calendar. Any genealogical software can also accommodate Jewish dates either by replacing such fields as "christening date" by a Jewish date or by using the "free fields" for Jewish dates. The conversion of Common Era dates to Jewish dates

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and vice-versa is done in a very effective way by special software of date converters. One of such converters can be found in JewishGen Tools <http://www.jewishgen.org/jos/josdates.htm>

c. Marking of Dates. There are several Common Era date formats. There is the American format where the month is registered before the day and the Continental format where the day is registered before the month, Jul-11-2003 or 7-11-2003 and 11-Jul-2003 or 11-7-2003 respectively. Variations of the two like: JUL.11.2003, Jul.11.2003, etc. are also acceptable.

Jewish dates may be recorded in Hebrew כ"ג תמוז תשס"ג or transcribed in Latin 23 Tamuz 5763.

It should be noted here that there is no direct correlation between the Common Era year and the Jewish calendar year since the New-Year dates do not coincide. For instance a date in July 2003 is in the year תשס"ג (5763), while a date in October 2003 is in the year תשס"ד (5764) in the Jewish calendar.

An effort should always be made to obtain at least the year of the event if the complete date is not available.

6. Distinguishing between persons with similar names

As remarked in the earlier paragraph, the name of the location served to distinguish between persons with similar given names, before people were required to use surnames and even after that. There were other features that served to distinguish between persons with the same given name:

a. The father's given name (patronymic), the first and most significant feature of them all: Yitzchak b'Avraham, Yehuda b'Shmu'el, Sara b'Meir, Frumet b'Pinchas, etc.

b. The location names, as discussed in the previous paragraph.

c. Dates, like the year of birth and/or year of death differentiating between persons of the same given name and same patronymic: R'Elyakim Getz b'Yakov Yosef d.1824, R'Elyakim Getz b'Yakov Yosef d.1885 and Elyakim Getz b'Yakov Yosef d.1895, all three were ADMORs of the same dynasty of Ostrog.

d. Profession. Most, if not all, genealogical software has a field for registering one's profession. This can be an additional criterion in distinguishing between persons with the same name.

In many families with rabbinical background we may encounter persons with the same name in different generations, for example a person and his grandfather or his great grandfather, or another person in the family – all listed as Rabbis or ABDs. These rabbis sometimes authored rabbinic works, by which they are also known. When prompted on my database, the name Yeshayahu HOROVITZ produces thirteen (13) entries, eight (8) of which Rabbis and ABDs. There is no problem to distinguish between them by the criteria discussed above: father's given name, locations and dates, although not all names have all details recorded. In the example below, four of the Rabbis can be distinguished also by their work:

R'Yeshayahu b'Avraham HOROVITZ m'Prag & FFdM 1568-1620 Shnei Luchot Habrit

R'Yeshayahu b'Shabtay HOROVITZ m'FFdM 1632-1689 Vave Haamudim

R'Yeshayahu b'Yakov HOROVITZ m'Lublin 1620-1695 Beit Halevi

R'Yeshayahu b'Pinchas HOROVITZ m'Hanczin -1943 Yavo Shilo

e. Surnames are supposed to serve as the ultimate means of distinguishing between persons that may have other similar features. Nevertheless, when entering and prompting a given name and the surname, say David SHAPIRA, the database may render a set of twelve (12) David SHAPIRAs with their code number. In order to know which specific David SHAPIRA you are seeking you click each code number, check all David SHAPIRAs and compare their data in the database, namely fathers name, locations, date of birth and/or date of death and of course the tribal affiliation.

f. Recording names. According to personal experience **good genealogical software should, among others, have a name field of 50-55 characters** in order to accommodate the given name of the person and his father, his surname, the location name and the tribe, if known:

Arye Mordechay b'Yehoshua Asher RABINOVITZ Hakohen

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Chayim Shlomo b'Natan Mordechay KATZNELENBOGEN m'Lublin

David Teweli b'Benjamin Binush KLAUSNER m'Posen

Rasha Tehila b'Chayim Shabtay KLAUSNER m'Vilna

In such a way the name field discloses in one stroke the most important information on the person and in this case if we enter the same David SHAPIRA, the computer will render the following information:

David b'Yoel SHAPIRA Hakohen m'Speyer

David b'Shimon SHAPIRA Hakohen m'Prag -1547

David b'Zvi Elimelech SHAPIRA m'Dynow 1804-1874

David b'Meir Yehuda SHAPIRA m'Sanok 1878-1924

David b'Yosef SHAPIRA m'Dynow -1932

David b'Pinchas Yehuda SHAPIRA 1880-1935

David b'Chayim Yakov SHAPIRA

David b'Irving SHAPIRA -1933

David SHAPIRA m'Terespol

David b'Meir Yehuda SHAPIRA m'Bukowsko 1878-1824

David b'Menachem Mendl SHAPIRA

David b'Shlomo SHAPIRA

7. Sources and References

The information we collect and record is obtained from different sources: oral communication, written communication (letters and other family-written material), official and semi-official institutions (various documents), books and booklets, etc.

All written material, photographs and other documents in our possession should be properly indexed by some identifying mark and filed accordingly for later use, while books and pamphlets should be recorded the way bibliography is usually recorded: author, title, publisher, year of publication, the page of the specific information and perhaps where the book may be found. All of this – to enable other people to use the information, and we also could return to those sources.

Any good genealogical software has pre-established fields for recording sources and references. Some software has fields to mark the degree of reliability of the sources, as well as the date the information was obtained.

8. Messages and Texts

Genealogical software provides space for shorter and/or longer messages, to record for each person impressions, stories, traditions and experiences that run in the family. More recent versions of software facilitate screening and recording of pictures of the person or his family environment, for later printing and reproduction.

The software usually provides means for concealing information on living persons that one would not like to be divulged (like dates of birth etc.), or information not likely to be disclosed even on a deceased person – known as “skeletons.” The information or message line preceded by # or * or any other character specified by the software will not appear in print.

9. Miscellaneous

Software may also provide fields for specific recordings, like: brit-mila dates, bar/bat-mitzvah dates, marriage ceremony details, divorce/separation/annulled marriage data, address label (cluster of fields including phone, fax, mobile phone numbers, e-mail address), burial place (different from place of death), occupation, generation count etc. and also facilitate the use of Hebrew letters and diacritics.

10. Final Remark

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I would like to express my opinion on what I consider a foremost feature required from software of Jewish genealogy, especially if it is aimed to facilitate a large database. A database of many generations would certainly include rabbinic lineage, and deal with periods when surnames were not compulsory and/or not used. The name of a person was then specified by one or several of the following attributes: his given name, the given name of his father, the location of his activity, his major literary work, the acronym of his name, his tribal affiliation. A software that would satisfy the requirement of recording such details, should have its main field, the name field, long enough, 55-60 digit length, at least, to accommodate names like:

Menachem Nachum Dov b'Shalom Yosef FRIEDMAN m'Sadegora	(11)
YomTov Gershon Shaul Lipman b'Zvi Natan HELLER HaLevi m'Krakow	(3)
Shmuel Shmelke b'Zvi Yehoshua Arye HOROVITZ HaLevi m'Rzeszow(30)	
Meir b'Yitzchak KATZENELNBOGEN m'Padua MAHARAM	(8)
Yosef b'Avraham Yakov KLAUSNER m'Hrubieszow BAHARAV	(41)
Mordechay David b'Yosef Yehoshua Heshel KLAUSNER m'Dabrowa	(9)
Benjamin Simcha Bunim b'Yehuda Arye Yakov MEISELS m'Mogilev	(5)
Arye Mordechay b'Yehoshua David Asher RABINOVITZ m'Zelechov	(11)
Shmuel Yitzchak b'Pinchas Arye Leib RAPPAPORT HaKohen m'Gnieszno	(10)
Mordechay b'Efraim Naftali UNKNOWN m'Szczeberzeczyn	(47)
Shmuel Eliezer b'Efraim Naftali UNKNOWN m'Vladimir	(65)
Eliyahu Yitzchak b'Chayim Matityahu Dov WEISSMANDEL m'New York	(1)

When searching the database for any of the above names most software programs require you to type the first given name and the surname and prompt "enter." This will render a list of persons with the same first name and the same surname. The number of occurrences of the names in the above list is marked in brackets () next to the names. So, for instance, by looking for R'YomTov Gershon Shaul Lipman HELLER, known as the Tosfot YomTov, one will type "YomTov HELLER" (most software programs do not discriminate between lower and upper case in typing a name) and get three names as follows:

YomTov Gershon Shaul Lipman b'Zvi Natan HELLER 1579-1654
 YomTov Lipman HELLER 1880-1942
 YomTov HELLER (the father of Rivka wife of Yeshaya b'Asher Zalman HOROVITZ MUNK 1465-1516)

It is obvious which YomTov HELLER we were looking for. Even in cases where we might get a large number of choices, the chances of getting two identical names with so many attributes as discriminants (various given names of the person, various given names of the father, location, tribal affiliation, acronym etc.) are very slim.

Not only is the large name field advantageous when searching for a person, but also when entering a new person, say one new YomTov HELLER. We will go through the same routine. Then on getting the list of the three already existing YomTov HELLERS we compare the attributes of the new YomTov HELLER with the attributes of the three in the list. If it matches with one of the existing persons then you let the new person go and just add the new source. If none of the existing YomTov HELLERS match the new one, you have a new person to record his entire data.

But the main benefit of an extended name field is having a panoramic view of most of the person's attributes in one line. All this by keeping the rules of recording as outlined in the previous chapters. Today there are software programs that have 100 characters for the name field.

The output of software, namely, printing and other statistical features was not the aim of this article, but could be the topic of another article.

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