

Demystifying how Arab names work ...
For Bedouin people our name is a very important thing and from a young age we start to teach our children their full name.

To our guests in Wadi Rum Bedouin names are a bit of a puzzle... In this post I would like to explain a bit about how Bedouin names work... its not as mysterious as you might think...
I wonder how many of you know the name of your Great Grandfather or your Great, Great Grandfather?

For Bedouin people this is common knowledge because of how we name our children.

Firstly when a child is born they are given their own first name. The parents choose this.

Then his second name is the name of his father.

His third name is the name of his grandfather.

Then his last name is the name of his tribe.

Some people might have another second tribal name if his tribe is a sub branch or a large tribe.

Lets look at my name:
Mehedi - my first name.
You can call me Mehedi when we meet. : D

Saleh - my second name. This is the name of my father.
You might need this when talking to other people about me. This is how we would differentiate me from another Mehedi in the village. There are not hoards of Mehedi's but there are a few others so to be sure who you mean when you talk about me you would say: **Mehedi Saleh**.

Sometimes if a person has a first name that is widely used - like Mohammed. Then you might well need his first name, second name and possibly even his third name to be sure who you mean. There is a fair chance if his name is Mohammed there are others with the same first and second name. Then you need to use his third name and possibly even his tribes name to differentiate him from the other Mohammed's.

Mohammed - my third name. This is the name of my Grandfather.
I don't use this so much in everyday life, but if my first name was Mohammed I might need to! However, I certainly know it and this is the name of my Grandfather.
Anyone only needs to know their fathers full name to know the name of their great grandfather. Most people will also know their grandfathers full name, and from that name you know your great grandfathers first name.

abu-Rabia - my tribe name. This is the sub group of a larger tribe.
This reveals the history of your tribe. Where your tribe comes from and your ancestry. Most people can talk about the relevant history of their tribe. How their tribe came to have the name they have, how they got to the place they are now living, and if there is a larger "parent" tribe when the smaller tribe became a sub tribe of the larger tribe.

Al Heuwaitat - my tribe name. This is the large "parent" tribe I belong to.

Finally this name reveals the large "parent" tribe I belong to and the history of my ancestry can be understood. The Heuwaitat can be traced back to the Prophet Mohammed and his daughter Fatima. You can read more about my tribe specifically on Bedouin Directions website HERE.
As you can see there is a lot in a name!

Women are also given a first female name, then their second and third names are also the names of their father and grandfather. When women get married they don't change their names. All their paperwork/ ID's etc remain the same.

Once they get married and have their first child they become known as: Um (mother) X (their first child's name). Usually if the first child is a daughter she will have her daughters name, then if she later has a son her name will change to Um (mother) of her son's name. Most people assume this is something sexist.

Perhaps it is, but in my opinion it is not sexist, the reason comes back to the fact that the girls will get married and move away (not necessarily but most likely). In the past particularly that would often involve moving far away from home during a time when travel was difficult and time consuming. The mother taking her children's name is a act of remembrance and we like to remember the present. Therefore, taking the name of your son you take the name of the person who will stay close to home, and it will most likely be his home you stay in when you are old. We see that as a beautiful thing.

Sometimes if the oldest son dies, people will switch to using the name of the second son, this is because they don't like to remind the mother of her loss. Perhaps, with girls names it is the same, because girls are destined to be "lost"....