

The Name of God—YHVH

Eric Michael Teitelman

Pastor • Teacher • Worship Leader



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ *Yeshua*:

God's name is the most frequently used noun in the Hebrew Bible, occurring over 6,800 times. Of all His names, only three correspond with His essence and are called the "names of essence (*Shemot HaAtzmut*)."ⁱⁱⁱ These three are the Tetragrammaton, *Yah*, and *Eh'Heh'Yeh*. The Tetragrammaton is spelled with only four consonants: *Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey* (יהוה), and is also called the "Four-Letter" name of God.ⁱⁱ God's four-letter name is His *written* name. These refer to what God *is*. All the other names only refer to what God *does* or applies to His actions.

This second group of names is divided into God's formal titles and His descriptive ones. God's formal titles, for example, include *Adonai* and *Shaddai*. *Adonai* means that God is the Master (*Adon*), and *Shaddai* means that He places limits on the creation (*She'amar Le'Olamot Dai*). God's non-formal descriptive names include terms like merciful, slow to anger, and truthful.

The sages tell us the four letters have twelve unique combinations. Six of the twelve are considered male, and six are female— "*Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them*" (*Genesis 1:26-27*).

And who is *us*? It is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and *Yeshua* is the incarnate image of the Father. It is in His image we are made— "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*" (*John 1:1-3*). God's *written* name came to life, and "*[Yeshua] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation*" (*Colossians 1:15*). Hence, "the word—the name—became flesh."ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

The sages also tell us that all nature is empowered by spiritual forces associated with the four letters of the name of God.^{iv} These four letters are *Hayah, Hoveh, and Yiyeh*, which means: He was, He is, and He will be. Overlaying this with the four consonants gives us God's name as three-in-one: *Yehovah, Yehoveh, and Yehovih*.

The name describes that God is the all-encompassing one. He is the Alpha and the Omega, and in Hebrew, the *Aleph* and the *Taph*. God is the beginning through the end, the past, present, and future. Just as *Yeshua's* name means salvation, God's name indicates that He is everything. His

name characterizes who He is. However, the name is phonetically unpronounceable because we cannot pronounce three variants concurrently.

A friend of mine recently shared with me what the Lord told him about His name. The Lord said to him: "You cannot pronounce my name until you realize that you cannot pronounce my name." This statement was puzzling until my friend discovered that God's name is phonetically unpronounceable. No wonder Yeshua spoke in parables.

So, how then could the high priest in the Temple pronounce the name of God on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement? Well, He probably did not. I surmise that God had to speak through him to utter His Holy name to the Jewish people. Therefore, the priest was merely God's conduit for the Holy Spirit to bless Israel.

There is a mysterious correlation between the *Shechinah*, the Holy Spirit, and God's Divine Light or glory (*Kavod*). However, they are not necessarily the same. All of them signify some form of Divine Immanence.^v

Our Sages tell us that: "The *Shechinah* spoke from the throat of Moses." They believed that Moses was so translucent because of his utmost humility towards God that he did not just relay God's message when he prophesied, but instead, the *Shechinah* spoke directly through his mouth.

Likewise, with all the prophets and those possessed of the Holy Spirit, we see that it was the supernal voice and speech of God that vested itself in their actual voice and speech, for it is written, "*The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue*" (2 Samuel 23:2).

Paul affirmed this when he said, "*The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers*" (Acts 28:25, NKJV).^{vi} We also see this happening on the Day of Pentecost, as it is written, "*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*" (Acts 2:4).

Imagine serving in the Temple and having the *Shechinah*, the manifest presence of God uttering His unpronounceable name through you? I cannot—no wonder the high priest could die if he were unclean when he entered the Holy of Holies. The sages do not attempt to pronounce any variant of God's name to prevent its defilement (the 3rd commandment).

However, nothing in the *Torah* prohibits a person from pronouncing the name of God.^{vii} Many common Hebrew names contain *Yah* or *Yahu*, which are part of God's four-letter name. And, the name was pronounced as part of daily services in the temple. Presently, the Temple Institute in Jerusalem is training a new generation of priests (*Kohanim*) to pray the Aaronic blessing using the full name of God for service in the future temple.^{viii} Unfortunately, I have not been able to hear exactly how they pronounce it.

There is strong evidence in favor of pronouncing God's name as *Hovah* (as in *Ye-ho-vah*). This because in Hebrew, *Ye* is the future tense of "to be" as in "shall." *Ho* is the present tense of "to

be" as in "is." And, *ah* is the past tense of "to be" as in "was." Thus *Ye-ho-ah* can mean "who was, who is, and who shall be." This understanding is in perfect alignment with God's own words, "I am that I am." When we insert the *Vav* (V sound), we have the pronunciation of *Ye-ho-v-ah*.

There is much debate about the actual pronunciation of the Lord's name, and from the above, we can see why. The most important thing to realize that YHVH (יהוה) is His name, and we must read His word from that place of intimacy. Christ has torn the veil that separated us from God, and now we have access to seek the face and speak the name of our Heavenly Father.

It is acceptable to use the words God and Lord, which I often do in public prayer. However, these titles feel rather cold or generic to me and do not speak to God's sovereignty and authority. They also neglect the personal attributes of His character attached to His name, directing us to talk about God rather than speaking to Him face to face.

In my prayers, I often use the name *Yehovah* or *Yahueh*, leaving the "V" silent, making a sound, which to me resonates with the breath of God. There is no right or wrong, and these are just my personal preferences. However, I pray that the Holy Spirit will utter through me his phonetically unpronounceable name. "*But the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*" (Romans 8:26).

Amen!

ⁱ Glotzer, Leonard R. *The Fundamentals of Jewish Mysticism: The Book of Creation and Its Commentaries*. Jason Aronson, Inc. 1992.

ⁱⁱ Sumner, Paul. *HaShem — The Name*. Hebrew Streams.

ⁱⁱⁱ John 1:14.

^{iv} Ibid. *The Fundamentals of Jewish Mysticism*.

^v Encyclopedia Britannica.

^{vi} All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

^{vii} Rich, Tracey R. *The Name of G-d*. 1996-2011. Judaism 101.

^{viii} Numbers 6:24-26.