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## Ha'Shem

**And it will come about that whoever calls on the Name of YHVH will be delivered (Joel 2:32).**

יהוה

**What is the “Sacred Name?”** It is a term that is widely accepted as the “Personal Name” of **God: YHVH**, sometimes called **the Tetragrammaton**. It is the most prolific **Name** for **God**, found in Scripture over 6,800 times. In no less than three places, the Torah warns us how to regard this **Name** (Hebrew: *shem*). In **Exodus 20:7** (and its parallel passage in **Deuteronomy 5:11**), the Third Commandment is often rendered as follows: **You must not take the name of ADONAI your God in vain, for ADONAI will not leave unpunished anyone who takes His Name in vain.** The word **in vain** translates the Hebrew word *shav* which means *emptiness, nothingness* or *vanity*. The NIV uses the word **misuse**. So the person guilty of rendering **the Name** null and void is to receive punishment. **Leviticus 24:15-16** helps to clarify this command: **Tell the people of Isra’el, “Whoever curses his God will bear the consequences of his sin; and whoever blasphemes the name of ADONAI must be put to death; the entire community must stone him. The foreigner as well as the citizen is to be put to death if he blasphemes the Name.”** The word **blaspheme** is the Hebrew *nakav*, which means *to pierce* or *bore*. In tandem with the instructions given in **Leviticus 15** about **if anyone takes His Name in vain**, the idea of **blaspheming the Name** seems to be something akin to doing violence to it, essentially abusing it, hence rendering it ineffective or useless. Given the seriousness of the mishandling of such **a Name** and the penalty of death associated with it, this eventually led to the practice within Judaism to greatly limit its use - the practice of avoiding the literal speaking of **the Name**.

**Historical avoidance of pronouncing the Name:** The Encyclopedia Judaica concisely tell us that “at least until the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC, this Name was regularly pronounced with its proper vowels, as is clear from the Lachish Letters, written shortly before that date. But at least by the third century BC the pronunciation of the name YHVH was avoided, and **ADONAI, The LORD**, was substituted for it, as evidenced by the use of the Greek word Kyrios, **LORD** for **YHVH** in the Septuagint,” the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and was presumably made for the Jewish community in Egypt when Greek was the common language throughout the region from the third to the first centuries BC.<sup>11</sup>

It was this avoidance of pronouncing the Name that led to writing the Name with special vowels by the Jewish scribes, the Masoretes, during the Middle Ages. This written notation of dots and lines in and around the Hebrew letters was developed to enable people who were unfamiliar with the language to read it, much in the same way the phonetic spelling of words in our modern dictionaries accurately depict how English words are to be pronounced. However, when it came to **the Sacred Name**, the Masoretes deliberately used vowel points, which simply reminded any reader to speak the name **ADONAI** in place of **YHVH** in keeping with the tradition. However, after the destruction of the Second Temple (so called Herod's Temple) there remained no trace of the pronunciation of **the Name**.<sup>12</sup>

**Is speaking the Name a biblical command?** The hot debate over the exact (or approximate) pronunciation of the Name is centered on the idea that the Bible commands us to speak (or do our best to speak) **the Name**. Such an understanding comes from passages that tell of **calling upon** or **proclaiming the Name** of **YHVH**. This idea of **calling upon the Name, proclaiming the Name**, praising or blessing **the Name** or anything like that does not mean that one must pronounce **the Name**, that is, to speak **it** audibly. It has to do with making known **the Person** and works of **ADONAI**, proclaiming **His** character, **His** fame, promoting **His** great reputation. We see this in **Deut 32:3**, which says: **For I proclaim the name of YHVH; come declare the greatness of our God!** where **proclaiming the Name** is parallel to **declaring the greatness of God**. **Proclaiming** or **declaring the greatness of God** means to rely upon, or **declare His** attributes as **He** has revealed to us through **His Word**.

While many champions for audibly pronouncing **the Name** will concede to this understanding, the pervading perception is that it fails to address the rudimentary concept of the purpose and use of having a name in the first place. Therefore, it seems incomplete to say that **proclaiming** or **calling upon the Name** does not contain the element of pronunciation. Indeed, there are many Torah commands that we don't know exactly how to

do - why should saying **the Name** be any different? Shouldn't we simply do the best we can to speak **the Name** of **YHVH**? As important as **the sacred Name** is to **God's** redeemed, it was apparently not so vitally important in the lives of some key biblical characters that the pronunciation of **YHVH** overshadowed the importance of the relationship between **the Creator** and the created.

For instance, in one of the most dramatic passages of Scripture, **ADONAI** says to **Moshe**, "**I will make My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the Name YHVH . . . [then] YHVH descended in a cloud; He stood there with Moses as he called upon the Name of YHVH. YHVH passed before him and proclaimed, YHVH, YHVH God! a God of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness** (see the commentary on **Ruth**, **to see link click [Af](#) - The Concept of Chesed**) and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet does not permit the guilty to go unpunished, but visits the iniquity of the parents upon their children to the third and fourth generations." **Moses then quickly bowed down low to the ground in worship (Exodus 33:19 and 34:5-8).**

**ADONAI** audibly spoke **His Name, YHVH**, no less than three times while **Moses** stood in **His** presence. **Moshe** responded quickly to the proclamation of the name of **YHVH** with worship in reverent fear. When **Moses** would speak next to **ADONAI** in one of the most profound, intimate moments of **his** life, **He** would surely be with the spirit of the moment to address **the Creator** according to **His Name**, now clearly spoken in **Moshe's** ears. In the very next verse, **Moshe** speaks to **the Creator** and says: **If now I have found favor in Your sight YHVH (ADONAI), I pray, let YHVH (ADONAI) go along in our midst . . . (Exodus 34:9).** In the presence of **the Creator**, having audibly heard **God Himself** pronounce **His Name** mere seconds before, **Moses** responded by calling **Him YHVH (ADONAI).**

Even **Yeshua participated in the Jewish tradition of not speaking the Name**, and instead used the substitutions. For example, twenty-nine times in **Matthew's Gospel**, **Messiah** is reported as using the substitute word **Heaven**. **From the time Yeshua began to preach and say: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Matthew 4:17).** Perhaps more importantly, when **Yeshua** would directly address **YHVH** in prayer, **He** would speak the name, **Father**, and even the most intimate term of all, **Abba**. **The Master** taught His apostles to pray by addressing **the Creator . . . Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name (Matthew 6:9)**, and in **His** hour of desperate need, **the Son** cried out: **Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I**

**will, but Your will be done (Mark 14:36).** Therefore, given the examples of **Moses** and **Yeshua** alone, we can state with confidence that neither salvation, nor relationship, nor the ability to fulfill **ADONAI's** commands are in any way jeopardized by not pronouncing **YHVH**. On the contrary, **Yeshua** may very well have taught us the fullness of revelation in approaching **YHVH** by calling **Him Father**.

**Is YHVH His only Name?** **ADONAI** does not have many names, **He** has only one **Name** - **YHVH** (Yud Hay Vav Hay). All the other names in the Bible, like **ADONAI Elohei-Tzva'ot** (the **LORD God of heaven's angelic armies**), **ADONAI Elohim** (**LORD God**), **ADONAI Nissi** (the **LORD my Banner**), **ADONAI Tzidkenu** (the **LORD of Righteousness**), or **ADONAI Shalom** (the **LORD of Peace**), describe **His** characteristics and **His** attributes.<sup>13</sup>