

# "The Sacred Name"

**A devotional Study by Pat Adamson**

With this writing, I offer my perspective on why any particular spelling (with vowels) or attempts at pronunciation of the Sacred Name YHVH, has historically missed the point. We all agree that the main focus should never be about us; rather, it's about Him. It's about the integrity of His Name – not ours. I intend to provide a valid perspective that when one speaks in the Name of God, it is not the literal pronunciation of the Name that is most important. What matters most is the character, attributes, purpose and meaning behind the Name. This understanding is essential to who He is – it's the basis of our relationship with Him, and amounts to "Halacha 101"<sup>1</sup> as we represent HaShem to the Jew first, and also to those who are not Jewish.

When I sit down to read parashah Sh'mot, one of the highlights for me involves Moshe's first recorded encounter with God at the burning bush. This was his first formal introduction to HaShem, so let's examine the dialogue taking place and see how God identifies Himself to Moshe. After 400 years the Israelites had grown all too familiar with the whip of their Egyptian taskmasters and their cries were heard by God at the same time He was setting the stage to bring about their release from captivity. In order for Moshe to lead his people and accomplish his mission, the forthcoming self-revelation from God was essential, intended to prepare him for the task ahead.

Exodus 3:1-15 CJB: *"Now Moshe was tending the sheep of Yitro his father-in-law, the priest of Midyan. Leading the flock to the far side of the desert, he came to the mountain of God, to Horev. <sup>2</sup>The angel of ADONAI appeared to him in a fire blazing from the middle of a bush. He looked and saw that although the bush was flaming with fire, yet the bush was not being burned up. <sup>3</sup>Moshe said, "I'm going to go over and see this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't being burned up." <sup>4</sup>When ADONAI saw that he had gone over to see, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moshe! Moshe!" He answered, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup>He said, "Don't come any closer! Take your sandals off your feet, because the place where you are standing is holy ground. <sup>6</sup>I am the God of your father." He continued, "The God of Avraham, the God of Yitz'chak and the God of Ya'akov." Moshe covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God. <sup>7</sup>ADONAI said, "I have seen how My people are being oppressed in Egypt and heard their cry for release from their slavemasters, because I know their pain. <sup>8</sup>I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that country to a good and spacious Land, a Land flowing with milk and honey, the place of the Kena'ani, Hitti,*

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<sup>1</sup> Halacha 101 – The manner in which one lives out his walk with G-d.

*Emori, P'rizi, Hivi and Y'vusi.* <sup>9</sup> Yes, the cry of the people of Isra'el has come to Me, and I have seen how terribly the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, now, come; and I will send you to Pharaoh; so that you can lead My people, the descendants of Isra'el, out of Egypt." <sup>11</sup>Moshe said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the people of Isra'el out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup>He replied, "I will surely be with you. Your sign that I have sent you will be that when you have led the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." <sup>13</sup>Moshe said to God, "Look, when I appear before the people of Isra'el and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you'; and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what am I to tell them?" <sup>14</sup>God said to Moshe, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh ["I am what I am" . . . or . . . "I will be what I will be]," and added, "Here is what to say to the people of Isra'el: 'Ehyeh [I Am or I Will Be] has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup>God said further to Moshe, "Say this to the people of Isra'el: 'Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [ADONAI], the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitz'chak and the God of Ya'akov, has sent me to you. 'This is My name forever; this is how I am to be remembered generation after generation.'"

There are a couple of things to keep in mind when reading this passage of Scripture. This was *Moshe's calling* – his commission of what he was to do for God on behalf of the people of Israel. We see that the thornbush was not consumed and that this revelation was accompanied by the voice of God. It was intended to comfort Moshe and assure him that:

- HaShem is still in control
- HaShem loves and cares for His people.
- Covenant is still important
- HaShem would fulfill the promises He made to His people.

In order to carry out the difficult task Moshe was called to carry out, he needed to know more of the God he was stepping forward to represent. So, one of the purposes involved with the famous encounter at the burning bush was that God would provide a title – He would give a Name to Moshe as part of the revelation of Himself.

**THE SACRED NAME** - So what about the so-called Sacred Name of God? Every Name (or title) of God relates something to us about what He does, or who He is, but in this encounter at the burning bush, HaShem revealed His *personal nature* to Moshe, and in doing so He also revealed His *personal character*.

In Sh'mot chapter 3 verse 11, during the Burning Bush encounter, Moshe learns something about the God he serves – something he will carry with him for the rest of his ministry. In verse 11 Moshe says to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" And God

replies, *"I will surely be with you."* What God seems to be saying here is: "It doesn't matter who you are – what's important is who I am!" It's not the integrity of Moshe's name that matters. What's important is the integrity of God's Name. Truly, this is the beginning of our basic relationship with the Father. It is also true that HaShem cares about each one of His children with tremendous passion and concern – that's His perspective. From our perspective, we should be concerned about honoring the Father and protecting the integrity of His Name because He first loved us and sent His Son in our behalf. Therefore, whenever we speak of the glories of the God of Israel, in effect, we are representing Yeshua to whomever God would place in our path.

In chapter 3 verse 13, Moshe says to HaShem, *"Look, when I appear before the people of Isra'el and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you'; and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what am I to tell them?"* (14) *God said to Moshe, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh ["I am what I am" . . . or . . . "I will be what I will be]," and added, "Here is what to say to the people of Isra'el: 'Ehyeh [I Am or I Will Be] has sent me to you.'"*

This is the leading (first) identification God makes of Himself to Moshe.

In other words, the Great "I AM" is known and identified by His connection to Israel. Therein lies the second identifier from HaShem - He is the God of their ancestors.

The whole point of this encounter between Moshe and God wasn't simply to get a name. The whole point of this encounter was that God would reveal more of His character and attributes that identify Him as uniquely above and beyond all that is. *"I am what I am" . . . or . . . "I will be what I will be"* is not a stationary-motionless expression like we are so accustomed to in Western thought. This expression is dynamic and transcendent which fits the Holy, transcendent God to a tee. You see, one of His attributes is that He transcends time – He is *outside* of time, and yet He can deal with us as individuals; corporately; even in a global sense, and all within the boundaries of time. So any term or expression that communicates His identity should be understood as a dynamic and transcendent expression because, God Himself is a dynamic and transcendent being – timeless and eternal.

**These two statements: He is the Great "I AM" – the Self-existent One and "the God of their ancestors" are the two leading identifiers HaShem makes of Himself to Moshe.**

In <**VERSE 15**> God says to Moshe, *"Say this to the people of Isra'el: 'Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [ADONAI], the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitz'chak and the God of Ya'akov, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever; this is how I am to be remembered generation after generation."*

Most commonly known as the Tetragrammaton, Yud-Heh-Vav-Hey (YHVH) is a Greek expression that means "4 letters." This is yet a *third identifier* God puts forth for Moshe's understanding, and this revelation hinges specifically on the Covenant faithfulness God maintains with Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov.

**Notice, within the totality of this self-description, YHVH is only *one segment* – one component of the identity God provided to Moshe.**

It also says He is the God of Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'akov. In Scripture, titles, names, or descriptive expressions of God may change, but He will always be the God of Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov. This is part of God's identity forever and nothing can change that. In fact, unless your theology is replacement (which is error), there is no way to separate or disconnect God from His people. To the Hebrew, a person's 'name' is actually a shortened version – a descriptive term that can point to character but is unable to define its essence.

Moshe knew God by the Name of YHVH and whenever His Name was mentioned, one of the things it communicated was that the God who cares for His people cares enough to keep the promises He makes to them. The Name YHVH is much more than merely a title – it's much more than simply a descriptive name. It's a proper noun because it's the actual Name of God. It is known by the rabbis as "Shem HaMeforash," which means the ineffable (unpronounceable/inexpressible) Name. This Name is so connected to the identity of the Holy One and regarded with such sacredness that the Rabbis would no longer pronounce it for fear that it would be said in a wrong way (or irreverently) and would therefore violate the commandment to not take the Name of God in vain. So historically, the only person who would say this Name openly/publicly, was the Cohen HaGadol – the High Priest on Yom Kippur.

The most common way we address Him today is simply as "God." I will often say "HaShem" (which literally means 'The Name') and immediately confers the idea of The Name which is above all other names. We sometimes address Him as "Adonai" which means LORD, or "Abba" which means Papa/Daddy. Each one of these expressions is a title.

Some folks want you to believe that you are not spiritually connected or you are at a lesser point of spiritual awareness if you are not using *their* particular way of pronouncing the tetragrammaton. The funny thing with groups like these is that there are (at least) a half-dozen different ways to pronounce YHVH. Some of these groups take a position that if you are not baptized (mikvehed) with their "version" of the Holy Name, *then your salvation is in question*. This extreme teaching is not only divisive and diversionary; it is also erroneous and heretical.

In the Shakespearean play, the author wrote, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet!" Now, you can call a rose anything you want to, but it will always do what is inherent to its nature – generally speaking, it provides a pleasing aroma and is nice to look at. These are some of the design characteristics we know to be inherent qualities of a rose. Our Heavenly Father, the Designer, also has qualities or attributes that cannot be separated from who He is, no matter the title, no matter the name.

Let me give you another example to further illustrate the point. I work in the Aerospace industry during the week as a Quality Control Engineer. Part of my responsibility at work is to periodically audit our suppliers. And the reason I do this is to verify that they are following our company's guidelines that will give us a measurable amount of assurance that good quality control is practiced and compliance standards are met. When I show up, generally they want to please me because they know who I represent. I am there with the authority and backing of my company. You see, it's not the name of my company that earns this respect, it's the way we do business and our reputation for good quality standards (not to mention the fact we are very timely in paying our suppliers). This is what the suppliers know about us and this is what is behind the name of the company I represent. The same is true with HaShem. It's not the literal and exact pronunciation of His Name that matters most, but rather, the character, attributes and authority that give the Name its meaning. When you speak in His Name, you are speaking with the meaning and with the authority behind the Name.

When the Torah was originally given, it was written with consonants and *no* vowels. The vowels were inserted later on by the Masoretes. Even so, there was never a time in Biblical history when the YHVH consonants were ever written with vowels. Why? Because with the ancient patriarchs, teachers and sages, there was the highest degree of respect and deep reverence for addressing HaShem in a holy manner. They understood that to speak the Name incorrectly would incur God's displeasure for violation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment – "*Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain*" – that is to say, to disrespect The Name. What this commandment actually has to do with is a willful or negligent misrepresentation of the character and attributes of God. So, unlike names in western culture, with Hebrew names, it's not the name but rather what is *behind* the name – what the name *represents* that is most important.

Some folks see names and titles of God, such as the common expression "HaShem," as a circumlocution. Circumlocutions are lengthy, round-about ways to say something. I don't see the title "God," "Adonai," "Lord" or "HaShem" as so-called circumlocutions. Traditionally, and because of the highest degree of reverence for the Holy One, these expressions have been

conventionally understood and embraced by the Jewish people for three millennia.

The Greek and Christian translators have also followed this example for thousands of years. And for most believers who have ever existed, even those who gave their lives as martyrs in sanctification of The Name (al Kiddush HaShem), the titles "God," "Lord," "Adonai" and "HaShem" were often the words uttered with their last, dying breath.

**Today, we use these terms as "reverent euphemisms" for HaShem that God both understands and welcomes.**

Question: If you don't happen to be Jewish, and yet view yourself as connected to the people of Israel (and I hope we all have that perspective based on Ephesians 2 and Romans 11) . . . if you see yourself as part of the people of Israel; if you see yourself connected to the covenants given to the people of Israel and view yourself as a follower of Yeshua just as His apostles and disciples followed Him . . . doesn't it make sense to refer to God with the same communal convention established for thousands of years? For over 3 millennia the people of Israel have been using reverent euphemisms to address HaShem, but the Sacred Name Movement would have us believe differently.<sup>2</sup>

Whenever you use the expressions "God," "Lord," "Adonai," or "HaShem," I would venture to say that you know Who it is you are addressing when you pray in this fashion, and certainly God knows your heart when you address Him this way. Why? Because you are doing so with the heart-knowledge of His attributes and character and you therefore address Him with these titles as terms of endearment. When I call my wife honey, or sweetie, do you think she is offended by these titles? Absolutely not! She is honored that I would think of her with such intimate regard. While none of these are her actual name, they are *terms of endearment* that she readily welcomes.

OK. Let's move on and take a look at some Bible verses to get a bigger understanding of this topic.

Matthew 26:59-64 -- (59) *"The head cohanim and the whole Sanhedrin looked for some false evidence against Yeshua, so that they might put him to death. (60) But they didn't find any, even though many liars came forward to give testimony. At last, however, two people came forward and said, (61) "This man said, 'I can tear down God's Temple and build it again in three days.'" (62) The cohen hagadol stood up and said, "Have you nothing to say to the*

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<sup>2</sup> With this writing, it is neither my intention nor desire to go into all the reasons the dogmatic approach from the Sacred Name Movement fails to honor God, the Jewish people, and the community of believers throughout the ages.

*accusation these men are making?" (63) Yeshua remained silent. The cohen hagadol said to him, "I put you under oath! By the living God, tell us if you are the Mashiach, the Son of God!" (64) Yeshua said to him, "The words are your own. But I tell you that one day you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of HaG'vurah [the Power] and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

Guess what folks. In this passage, the term "HaG'vurah" (the Power) is used by Yeshua as a reverent euphemism for God! Obviously, one needs to ask why Yeshua wouldn't have directly expressed/pronounced the "Sacred Name" here if it was so very important to do so. Certainly we all remember His words when he taught His disciples to pray. What expression did He use for God's identity? Was it Jehovah? Yehovah? Yahwey? Yehuah? Yehowah? No. He said, *"Pray like this: Our Father in heaven."*<sup>3</sup> "Father" is one of those descriptive titles but it's also a reverent euphemism – it's a term of endearment.

"Kingdom of Heaven" is another expression Yeshua used over and over again in His teachings about God.<sup>4</sup> In fact, every time He says "Kingdom of Heaven" He is using this expression as a reverent euphemism for the Kingdom of HaShem. For Yeshua, this was a term of reverence and endearment when speaking about the Father.

At Mt. Sinai when the Torah was given to Moshe a second time, we read another one of his fascinating encounters with God. In Exodus 34:5-6 CJB we read that, (5)"ADONAI descended in the cloud, stood with him [Moshe] there and pronounced the name of ADONAI. (6) ADONAI passed before him [Moshe] and proclaimed: "YUD-HEH-VAV-HEH!!! Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [ADONAI] is God, merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in grace and truth . . ."

I believe the text is clear that the Angel (who is identified as YHVH), descended in the cloud and declared to Moshe the Name and the meaning of the Name on Mt. Sinai. And I believe it is clear the identity of God is much deeper than a mere title or name – the identity of God consists of a list of character attributes. Therefore, this example was not a lesson on pronunciation – it was a deeper, more thorough, more complete revelation of who God truly is.

Now, back in Exodus chapter 6, *this same Angel* had already spoken to Moshe. Take a look at verses 2 and 3. This Angel speaks to Moshe and says, *"I am ADONAI. I appeared to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov as El Shaddai [God Almighty] "although **I did not make myself known to them by my name, YHVH.**"*

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:9

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:2; Matthew 5; et al.

In light of this statement from HaShem, and since we've been talking about the Name of God beginning from Moshe onward, it's important to see what the Scriptures might tell us concerning any prior revelation of His Name. Notice, He says "*I did not make myself known to them by my name, YHVH.*" He is making a very important point but it is easy to overlook. Was the Holy Name of God – YHVH, known to the people prior to Moshe? Yes, it was! So what do you suppose God is revealing here? Again, we are not talking about a literal pronunciation of the Name. When HaShem says "*I did not make Myself known to them,*" what He is referring to is *the cumulative and progressive revelation of His attributes over time*. His emphasis here is not so much directed toward a name or title, and we can be assured of this because the letters and the pronunciation of YHVH were already known to mankind long before this.

Where? In B'resheet/Genesis 4:26 all the way back during the time of Enosh, it reads, "*Then men began to call upon the Name of YHVH.*" The word used here is the Name YHVH (or "LORD" in most English translations today).

So the statement in Exodus 6:2-3 does not mean that the people of Israel were oblivious concerning the Name YHVH or how to pronounce it. What it means is that they hadn't yet received the full revelation of the *meaning* (attributes and character) behind God's name! In other words, they already had knowledge of YHVH, but the full meaning was progressively revealed leading to Sinai, and culminating later on with Yeshua. Based on this fact, it is fairly certain that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov all knew how to call upon YHVH whenever they needed to, but they didn't have the complete *meaning* of God's Name at that time. They only knew Him as "El" or "Elohim" which has to do with God's "power." The first revelation of God was that of El Shaddai, the God of nature, provision, power, and protection. But more Progressive Revelation eventually came to the people of Israel. They began to learn about *judgment, redemption, and holiness* as additional key attributes of God which was further character revelation received at Sinai, not a different way of pronouncing the letters which they already knew!

Remember the mysterious angel who seems to be popping up all over the Biblical record of history? In Exodus chapter 23, God says, "*Behold I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way . . . be careful of Him and hear His voice . . . for My name is inside Him.*"

This remarkable prophecy reveals that the name YHVH would be contained *within* the name of the Angel who would go before the people of Israel and "would have the power, character, and authority of YHVH. Both dimensions of this prophecy were accomplished when Yeshua received His name at birth."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Asher Intrater – Ahavat Yeshua Congregation, "*Yahweh or Yehovah?*"

In John chapter 8 the Judeans were looking for a reason – for any reason to accuse Him, but Yeshua responded, *"You want to claim that Avraham is your father and, therefore, you rest in his merits. I tell you the truth, before Avraham was, I am."* In other words, Avraham was great, but before he even existed Yeshua was already on the scene! In fact, Yeshua continues and says to them that Avraham himself, *". . . rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was glad."*

When Yeshua said "I am," in John 8:58, if you take a look at the Greek, it is "ego e-imi." In this context it is clear that when Yeshua used the "I am" (ego e-imi) expression, He was using it in reference to His eternal nature. And even though it is recorded here in Greek, more than likely, the original expression was in Hebrew which provides even more credence to the association Yeshua was making. Needless to say, His accusers were absolutely stunned! How did they react? It says, *". . . they picked up stones to stone Him."* Why? Because they understood very clearly that Yeshua was making claim to an eternal existence and alluding to the same identity as the "I AM" of the Torah who revealed Himself to Moshe at the burning bush! So when they picked up stones to stone Him – in this context, it was clearly a reaction against what they perceived as blasphemy.

"Some Christians and Messianic Jews today want to spell the Messiah's name as Y'shua or Yahshua, while many Israelis refer to Him as Yeshu ["Yeshu" is a derogatory name]. All of those pronunciations are patently incorrect."<sup>6</sup> When speaking of salvation, the word "yeshua" is found thirty (30) times in the Hebrew text from the post-exilic history books of the Bible (like Ezra and Nehemiah). And every single time the word/name Yeshua is written by the translators, it is always written with a "tzerey" in the middle and an "ayin" at the end. The expression "YAHshua" is an invented name. It is a conjured, made up name that carries no etymological background in support of the claims of the Sacred Name Movement.

Back to Scripture. What about other New Covenant writers? Did any Apostolic writings use the "YHVH" when describing God? No. All of the New Covenant writers followed previous Jewish tradition in not using God's Name. Instead, according to the Greek, they unanimously use the word "kurios" which means Lord. That seems to be a significant affirmation of the same tradition we uphold today!

Do you recall the seven Skeva brothers in Acts chapter 19? They were all sons of the Kohen HaGadol (High Priest). There was no problem for them in pronouncing Yeshua's Name – they all did so perfectly. But it's also quite clear

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<sup>6</sup> Asher Intrater – Ahavat Yeshua Congregation, "Yahweh or Yehovah?"

in this Biblical account that they utterly missed the meaning and authority of the Name. As a result, they were quickly overcome by haSatan (Acts 19:14).

Yeshua's name in Hebrew simply means "salvation." He is our salvation. One significant and glorious part of Yeshua's Name is to know that there is Cumulative Progressive Revelation of "His-story" poured into it. Moreover, all the power and authority – even the Name YHVH itself is found inside the given birth name of the Messiah. When one follows the Biblical commandment to speak in the Name of God, you do so with the power and authority of Yeshua, and therefore you don't need to stress about how to pronounce YHVH, because it is already contained in Yeshua.

Asher Intrater is a Rabbi/Pastor in Israel. In a paper he wrote entitled *Yahweh or Yehovah*, he "summarizes the revelation of the divine names this way: "El" [as in El Shaddai] stands for God's power, ["YHVH" – the Tetragrammaton] stands for His holiness, and "Yeshua" stands for His love. Those are the three general attributes of God: power, holiness, and love. God revealed His name (His character qualities) to mankind in three great progressive revelations. "God is all powerful, yet His power is controlled by His holiness. God is perfectly holy, yet His love overcame the holiness by offering us an opportunity to receive forgiveness [through Yeshua's sacrifice] long before the Day of Judgment and punishment comes."<sup>7</sup>

[Halleluyah!] The Biblical record describes Him first as Elohim. Then we are introduced to Him as YHVH. Today, we know Him in the most intimate and personal way as Yeshua our Savior and Lord. With Yeshua, we are reminded of the power of HaShem, the holiness of HaShem, and the love of HaShem. In Him the harmony of God's character is revealed in One Person. We're told in the book of Philippians chapter 2, verse 9 that Yeshua is the Name above all names, and we're also instructed in Acts chapter 4 verse 12 that this is the only Name by which mankind can be saved.

In whatever way you choose to address God in the privacy of your heart is entirely up to you. And HaShem sees your heart and knows the manner in which you address Him. But if you claim to be part of a people that have held such a high regard – such a high reverence for God for over 3 millennia, then why would anyone who is part of this people use language that would be utterly offensive to that community? We need to be respectful of the people we claim to be part of and we should be respectful of the reverent traditions our fathers have handed down to us.

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<sup>7</sup> Asher Intrater – Ahavat Yeshua Congregation, "*Yahweh or Yehovah?*"

In Isaiah chapter 43 verse 1 this is what Adonai says, *"He who created you, Ya'akov, He who formed you, Isra'el: "Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I am calling you by your name; you are Mine.""*

God's desire is to make a powerful connection with His people. He desires to make a powerful connection with you, and He's not just dealing with names and titles here. In much the same way that we understand and address Him, He is expressing a very gracious understanding of the character qualities – the attributes of the individual. This is the way He understands and deals with you. He has called you by name that His purposes will be accomplished in your life. In John 10:3 it says the Shepherd knows His sheep by name. HaShem knows you because you have been created in His image. But He also knows you by Name – by your heart, your character, your integrity, your faith, your love.

Y'va-rech-cha ADONAI v'yish-m'recha.

May the LORD bless you and keep you.

Baruch HaShem!