

What is the Name?

The proper Name of God as given in the Tanakh is יהוה.

There have been various attempts in recent years to begin pronouncing this Name. Many people use the term “Yahweh” which is a misunderstanding of the Hebrew text. Others use Yehowah or Yehovah. There are various arguments for each of these pronunciations. Based upon the arguments presented by Nehemiah Gordon and others I choose to use the pronunciation of Yehovah.

God first uses this name in Bereishit 2:4 which reads:

*These are the begetting of the heavens and the earth: their being created. At the time of YHWH, God's making of earth and heaven...*<sup>1</sup>

This Name is God's eternal name as we see in Shemot 3:15:

*And God said further to Moshe: Thus shall you say to B'nei Yisrael: YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, and the God of Yaakov, sends me to you. This is my name for the ages, that is my title (from) generation to generation.*<sup>1</sup>

According to the Strong's Concordance, יהוה occurs 6,519 times in the Tanakh.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the text of the Tanakh we can easily see that there is a favorable attitude toward pronouncing the Name. The Tanakh does not explicitly prohibit pronouncing the Name but it does warn against any misuse or blaspheming using the Name יהוה.

According to Rabbinical Law the Name יהוה is not to be pronounced as it is written.

*R. Abina opposed [two verses]: It is written: 'this is my name'; but it is also written: 'and this is my memorial'? — The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I am not called as I am written: I am written with yod he [יהוה], but I am read, alef daleth [Adonai]. (Kiddushin 71a)*<sup>3</sup>

Rambam explains that the Name was only recited in the Beit HaMikdash and the Name “Adonai” was used in everyday life.

*They [\*the priests\*] recite [God's] name - i.e., the name יהוה-י-י, as it is written. This is what is referred to as the "explicit name" in all sources. In the country, it is read [using another one of God's names]: אדני, for only in the Temple is this name [of God] recited as it is written. (Tefillah and Birkat Kohanim 14:10)*<sup>4</sup>

In addition to using the term “Adonai” which means “my Lord” many people will use the term Hashem which means “The Name” and refers to the name יהוה. Adonai is a term that is generally used in tefillah and when reading Tanakh. This has become standard halakhah within Rabbinical Judaism.

Such was the fierce resistance to saying the Name יהוה after the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash that a mishnah was written declaring that:

*...But the following have no portion [in the world to come]: He who maintains that resurrection is not a Biblical doctrine, the Torah was not divinely revealed, and an epikoros. R. Akiba added: One who reads uncanonical books. Also one who whispers [a charm] over a wound and says, I will bring none of these diseases upon thee which I brought upon the Egyptians: For I am the Lord that healeth thee. Abba Saul says: Also one who pronounces the Divine Name as it is spelt. (Sanhedrin 90a)<sup>5</sup>*

The Talmud records that the end of the pronunciation of יהוה began after the death of Simon ha-Tzaddik.

*Our Rabbis taught: In the year in which Simeon the Righteous died, he foretold them that he would die. They said: Whence do you know that? He replied: On every Day of Atonement an old man, dressed in white, wrapped in white, would join me, entering [the Holy of Holies] and leaving [it] with me, but today I was joined by an old man, dressed in black, wrapped in black, who entered, but did not leave, with me. After the festival [of Sukkoth] he was sick for seven days and [then] died. His brethren [that year] the priests forbore to mention the Ineffable Name in pronouncing the [priestly] blessing. (Yoma 39b)<sup>6</sup>*

Originally the Tanakh had no vowel marks or punctuation marks. A group of Jews – known collectively as the Masoretes – produced manuscripts of the Tanakh with vowel markings based upon tradition, a close examination of pronunciation, and Hebrew grammar.

As seen in the Leningrad Codex (written in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century) the Masoretes (Karaites) wrote the Name יהוה in six different ways – with varied vowel markings.<sup>7</sup>

Bereishit 3:14; Bereishit 15:2; Shoftim 16:28; Shoftim 16:28; Melakhim Aleph 2:26; Yechezkiel 24:24

In many modern Tanakh's the Name יהוה is written as אדני. Tradition – and many scholars – will tell us that these vowel markings are present in order to remind the reader to say “Adonai” but the problem is that the vowel markings do not correlate to those of “Adonai” (אדני). If the Name יהוה was actually written with the vowel markings of “Adonai” the Name would have been written as Y<sup>e</sup>hovah.<sup>8</sup>

The Masoretes (who were Karaite Jews) were of two opinions regarding the Name יהוה. There were those who followed the strictures of the Rabbinate and did not pronounce the Name יהוה.

There were others who rejected the man-made laws of the Rabbinates and pronounced the Name יהוה.

*It is clear that the Masoretes belonged to the group that forbade the pronunciation of the name and this was why they suppressed the middle vowel from Y<sup>e</sup>hovah. At the same time they heard how the other Karaites pronounced the name so they knew how it was properly pronounced.*<sup>8</sup>

The Name of יהוה needs to be restored.

*And it will be that anyone who calls in the Name of [יהוה] will escape, for on the mountain of Tzyion and in Yerushalayim there will be refuge as [יהוה] said, and among the survivors whom [יהוה] summons. (Yoel 3:5)*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Everett Fox. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: Schocken Books, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> James Strong. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Epstein, I. *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*. London: Soncino Press, 1949. [ <http://halakhah.com/pdf/nashim/Kiddushin.pdf> ]

<sup>4</sup> Eliyahu Touger, ed. *Mishneh Torah*. New York: Moznaim Publishers, 1990. [ [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/920179/jewish/Chapter-Fourteen.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/920179/jewish/Chapter-Fourteen.htm) ]

<sup>5</sup> Epstein, I. *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*. London: Soncino Press, 1949. [ <http://halakhah.com/pdf/nezikin/Sanhedrin.pdf> ]

<sup>6</sup> Epstein, I. *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*. London: Soncino Press, 1949. [ <http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Yoma.pdf> ]

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Kimball. "The Westminster Leningrad Codex." *Tanach.us*. Tanach.us, n.d. [ <http://tanach.us/Tanach.xml#Home> ]

<sup>8</sup> Nehemia Gordon. *The Pronunciation of the Name*. karaite-korner.org. Karaite Korner, n.d. [ [http://karaite-korner.org/yhwh\\_2.pdf](http://karaite-korner.org/yhwh_2.pdf) ]

<sup>9</sup> Nosson Scherman, ed. *The Stone Edition Tanach*. New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2007.