

What's In a Name?

In the Bible, a name has much more meaning than just the letters that compose it. A name represents the character of a person, and their reputation. It is literally “who” they are. We see times where Elohim, our Creator, changed the names of His servants. Perhaps because they had exhibited a change in character, or because He knew that they at some point would. We see this when Avram’s name was changed to Avraham, and when He changed Ya’akov to Yisra’el. We see Ya’akov change the name of his son from Ben Oni to Binyamin, and Moshe changed Hoshe’ah to Yehoshua. We are also told in Hitgalut 3:12:

“He who overcomes I will make a pillar in the Heikhal of my Elohim, and he shall not go out again; and I will write upon him the Name of my Elohim and the Name of Yerushalayim HaKhadashah which comes down out of heaven from my Elohim; and I will write upon him my new Name.”

Names are therefore important in scripture, and no name is more important than the Name of our Creator. When we talk about the Name of Elohim, what are we talking about? We know He has many names, but most are actually titles. He says of Himself in Shemot 3:14 ; “Ehyeh asher ehyeh” (I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE).

However, He goes on to say in verse 15:

“And Elohim said moreover unto Moshe, “Thus shall you say unto B’nei Yisra’el, ' יהוה , the Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Avraham, the Elohim of Yitz’khak, and the Elohim of Ya’akov, has sent me unto you; this is My Name forever, and this is My memorial unto all generations.”

The language is pretty clear that the name of Elohim is יהוה , and it is His Name forever. He also says that it is a Memorial unto all generations. The word Zikhri, “My memorial”, is from the root ‘zekher,’ which means just what it says, a memorial, more specifically, however, a remembrance by *speaking*.

We can see with this simple reading of scripture that Elohim does have a Name, and that Name is His Name forever, and that Name is supposed to be a spoken memorial throughout all generations. But how can you remember something that you don’t say? The Jewish people haven’t spoken His Name for almost 2,000 years, and guess what? They forgot how to say it, or at least most of them did, and now they will say that not knowing how to pronounce it is another reason that we cannot speak it. That doesn’t sound like treating His Name as a spoken memorial, does it? A memorial is supposed to be remembered.

Before going over the manmade tradition of not saying the Name of יהוה , let’s instead for a moment forget all manmade doctrine, all traditions that we have heard or been taught. Let us instead look at Scripture, apart from interpretation, for a moment, and see what we can come up with in regard to speaking the name of יהוה .

If we were to read the entire Tanakh in Hebrew and we were to count the number of times that the Name יהוה appeared, we would see that it appears some 6,800 times. If we look at the context and what is happening at the times that the Name יהוה appears, we would see that many of those are records of actual conversations. That means that what was written is what was said or spoken. If we believe that Scripture is true, we have to acknowledge that His Name was spoken thousands of times by a lot of people, according to His Word.

There are also times we see that Scripture specifically says that His Name was spoken. For example:

In Ber'shit 4:26 "Enosh Az Hukhal LiKaro B'Shem יהוה" "...then men began to call upon the Name יהוה"

The Hebrew Word in this verse for 'call' is from 'Kara,' and according to a **Jewish** Lexicon, that word means: *to call out (that is, properly address by name, but also used in a wide variety of applications) to call for, to cry out, to make a proclamation, pronounce, say.*

We also see that יהוה commanded people to **SAY** His Name. We already saw one incident in Shemot 3:15 "Thus shall you **say** unto B'nei Yisra'el, ' יהוה the Elohim of your fathers..." The Hebrew word for 'say' here is VaOmer, from the word 'Amar,' which simply means to say or speak.

Later in Shemot chapter 9:15, through Moshe, יהוה tells Paroh why He has not yet destroyed him:

*"Surely now I would have put forth My hand, and smitten you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But in very deed for this cause have I made you to stand, to show you My power, and that My Name may be **declared** throughout all the earth."*

In D'varim chapter 26 (parasha KiTavo) the Yisra'elites are commanded to perform something very specific:

*And it shall be, **when you come** into the land which יהוה your Elohim gives you for an inheritance, and possess it, and dwell therein; 2that you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you shall bring in from your land that יהוה your Elohim gives you; and you shall put it in a basket and shall go unto the place which יהוה your Elohim shall choose to cause His Name to dwell there. 3And you shall come unto the kohen that shall be in those days, and say unto him, 'I profess this day unto יהוה our Elohim, that I am come unto the land which יהוה swore unto our fathers to give us.' 4And the kohen shall take the basket out of your hand, and set it down before the Mizbe'akh of יהוה your Elohim. 5And you shall speak and say before יהוה your Elohim, 'A wandering Arami was my father; and he went down into Mitzrayim, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6And Mitzrayim dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. 7And we cried unto יהוה the Elohim of our fathers, and יהוה heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. 8And יהוה brought us forth out of Mitzrayim with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. 9And He has brought us into this place, and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which You, O יהוה have given me.' And you shall set it down before יהוה your Elohim, and worship before יהוה your Elohim.*

Six times every individual Yisra'elite would have had to say the Name of יהוה before the kohen when they performed this command.

In Shemot 24:3 we have another example of being told to speak His Name.

"And Moshe came and told the people all the D'varim of יהוה, and all the Mishpatim; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the D'varim which יהוה has spoken, will we do."

We have given just a few examples here, but there are countless examples of people speaking or being told to speak the Name יהוה in Scripture. Now let's look at some examples where יהוה commands people to read His Word, and within that reading, His Name is present. This is very important, and we will get to why in a minute.

Continuing on in Shemot chapter 24, starting in verse 4 it says:

“And Moshe wrote all the D’varim of יהוה, and rose up early in the morning, and built a Mizbe’akh under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Yisra’el. 5And he sent the young men of B’nei Yisra’el, who offered Olot and sacrificed Sh’lamim of oxen unto יהוה. And6 Moshe took half of the blood and put it in basins; and half of the blood he dashed against the Mizbe’akh. 7And he took the Sefer HaBrit, and read in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that יהוה has spoken will we do and obey.” 8And Moshe took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the Brit, which יהוה has made with you in agreement with all these words.”

If we count the times the Name יהוה is listed in the B’rit that Moshe wrote, we have seven times in the 10 D’varim alone. Then, if we count the mishpatim that were given from the beginning of chapter 21 to the end of chapter 23, we see there are five more times. So we know that within the B’rit, the covenant here, His Name is written at least 12 times. We also know that Moshe was commanded to read ALL the words, so we know His Name was read out loud multiple times here to all of Yisra’el.

We also see in D’varim 27:8 that when the blessings and curses are read Elohim commands them:

“And you shall write upon the stones all the words of this Torah very plainly.”

Continuing on in D’varim 27 when the blessings and curses are spoken from mount Gerizim and mount Eval starting in verse 14 it says:

“And the Levi’im shall speak, and say unto all the men of Yisra’el with a loud voice, ...”

What follows is that in a loud voice from chapter 27:14 through chapter 28:68 the Levi’im spoke in a loud voice and used the name **41 יהוה times**. This was also written in plaster for the purpose of being read aloud.

In Yehoshua 8:32-35 we read that Yehoshua did the same thing.

Then Yehoshua built a mizbe’akh unto יהוה Elohei Yisra’el, in Har Eval, as Moshe the servant of יהוה commanded B’nei Yisra’el, as it is written in the book of the Torah of Moshe, a mizbe’akh of unhewn stones, upon which no man had lifted up any iron; and they offered thereon Olot unto יהוה, and sacrificed Sh’lamim. 32And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the Torah of Moshe, which he wrote before B’nei Yisra’el. 33And all Yisra’el, and their elders and officers, and their shoftim, stood on this side of the Aron and on that side before the Kohanim, the Levi’im that bore the Aron HaBrit יהוה, as well the stranger as the home-born; half of them in front of Har Gerizim and half of them in front of Har Eval; as Moshe the servant of יהוה had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Yisra’el. 34And afterward he read all the words of the Torah, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Sefer HaTorah. 35There was not a word of all that Moshe commanded which Yehoshua read not before all the congregation of Yisra’el, and the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that walked among them.

To recap so far:

1. The Name of יהוה is written in the Tanakh about 6,800 times, and a large portion of those are just historical records of actual conversations where people are saying His Name.
2. We see יהוה Himself say that one of the purposes of the plagues in Mitzrayim was so that His Name was proclaimed throughout the world.
3. There are many times we see that the Name of יהוה was commanded to be spoken.
4. We also see examples of times where His Name is commanded to be written and

subsequently read aloud.

5. יהוה said that His Name is His Name forever and that it is to be a spoken Memorial (aka something to be remembered by speaking.)

In further support of this conclusion, we can look to David and Yehonatan.

When David was about to depart, Yehonatan, who loved David intimately, was grieved very sorely. In direct contrast to his own father's commitment to kill David, Yehonatan makes a covenant with David:

"Go in shalom, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the Name of יהוה , saying: יהוה shall be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, forever." Shmu'el Alef 20:42

This is an intimate, private conversation between two men, outside the formal, commanded practices of Judaic faith, and the Name is clearly uttered here by Yehonatan, who is not a kohen, a levite, nor a prophet. There are many such other instances where the Name is uttered in such 'casual' context, such as between Ruut and Na'omi. Clearly, the Name was used by the faithful in any setting where they are glorifying the creator, calling on Him, or speaking about Him.

If we had no manmade traditions to look to regarding the act of speaking His Name out loud, and all we did was to read scripture, we would not ever question whether we should or should not speak His Name. Many people throughout scripture spoke the name of יהוה , and many were even commanded to, not to mention that His Name is supposed to be a spoken memorial, in order to be remembered.

How did it come to this then? That Yisra'el, whom יהוה brought out of Mitzryim and who were told by Moshe that: " יהוה the Elohim of your fathers...sent me" forgot how to say His Name, and forgot that His Name IS a memorial? Two words: '**bad doctrine.**' That's how. By listening to men who follow their own made up traditions in place of the clear Word of the Creator of the universe: יהוה .

Now that we took a brief look at what Scripture clearly says let's look at the other side of this "argument".

The act of not saying the Name of יהוה is **tradition**. It is not commanded anywhere in Scripture. In fact, just the opposite is commanded. We are to proclaim the Name of יהוה .

There is, however, one passage of scripture in VaYikra chapter 24 that, to some, may seem to say that we are not supposed to speak the Name, but that is because the English rendering in some Bibles is not actually what the Hebrew says, but words have been added to support the doctrine of not saying the Name.

Here is the English rendering of VaYikra 24:11 and 24:15-16 from Chabad, but many other Jewish translations follow this example of translation:

And the son of the Israelite woman pronounced the [Divine] Name and cursed...(24:11)

And to the children of Israel, you shall speak, saying: Any man who blasphemes his God shall bear his sin And one who blasphemously pronounces the Name of the Lord, shall be put to death; the entire community shall stone him; convert and resident alike if he pronounces the [Divine] Name, he shall be put to death.

What the Hebrew actually says in these passages is this:

וַיִּקַּב בְּנוֹ-הָאִשָּׁה הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית אֶת-הַשֵּׁם וַיִּקְלֵל וַיִּבְיֹאוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַשֵּׁם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹמִית
בְּתִדְבָרֵי לְמַטֵּה-דָן:

Verse 11 literally says: **and Blasphemed** (ViYikov from the root nakav which means; to puncture, literally or figuratively to libel, in other words to somehow do damage to.) **the son of the Israelite woman et ‘the Name’ and cursed** (VaY’kalel from the root Kalel which means to make light, trifling, or vile).

וְאֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּדְבָר לֵאמֹר אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי-יִקְלֵל אֱלֹהָיו וַנִּשְׂאָ חַטָּאוֹ: נִקַּב שֵׁם יְהוָה מוֹת יוּמָת
רְגוּם יִרְגְּמוּ-בּוֹ כָּל-הָעֵדָה כַּגֵּר כְּאֲזָרָח בְּנִקְבוֹ שֵׁם יוּמָת:

Verses 15 and 16 literally say: **And to all the sons of Yisra’el speak to say man, man (any man) whoever curses (Kalal) his Elohim bears his penalty. And (he that) blasphemes (Nakav) the Name of יהוה (shall) die (mot), die (yumat) (surely die) cast together, cast. All the assembly, or resident stranger or native born, when he blasphemes (Nakav) the Name shall die.**

So, a better English rendering is:

“And you shall speak unto B’nei Yisra’el, saying, 'Whoever curses his Elohim shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemes the Name of יהוה , he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him; the stranger, as well as the home-born, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”

Nowhere in the Hebrew text does it say anything about simply speaking or pronouncing His name. This section of scripture is about **Blaspheming**, i.e. damaging the Name, the character and reputation of יהוה , specifically by cursing another human in His Name. The Jewish translators here do a sinful thing, they break a commandment of יהוה : “Do not add to or take away from this Torah”, to support a manmade **tradition**: ‘Do not speak the Name of יהוה .’

However, not all Jewish tradition is bad or wrong, as some teach. In fact, much of it is good, and it points us to the Torah. We just have to be able to discern between the two. We are given a clear measuring stick with which to judge whether or not we should keep a tradition. That measuring stick is the teachings of our Master, Yeshua HaMashiakh.

If a tradition causes us to break a commandment of יהוה , it is not a tradition we should practice. Also, if a tradition adds to or takes away from the Word of יהוה , then it is a tradition that is causing us to break that commandment. If Yeshua taught against it, either directly or in principle, we should not practice that tradition.

If we apply these qualifications of practicing a tradition to this particular tradition, what do we get?

1. Does the tradition of not speaking the Name of יהוה cause us to break a commandment? – **Yes, we are commanded to proclaim His Name, and His Name is supposed to be a spoken memorial for *all time*.**
2. Does the tradition of not speaking the Name of יהוה cause us to add to or take away from the Torah? – **Yes, when we read Scripture we would have to take away His Name and replace it with something else.**
3. Does Yeshua teach against this tradition? **No: however, the fact is that because we lost so many Jewish historical records with the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and the scattering of the Jewish people by Rome, we cannot prove precisely when this tradition**

started, nor, more importantly, when it became widespread among Jews.

4. Does Yeshua practice this tradition of not saying the Name of יהוה ? **No, He does speak the Name. And furthermore, He would have had to speak it.**

It is clear by this evaluation that we should not follow this tradition, because it does go against Torah. If this tradition clearly breaks Torah, then why are so many Messianic believers following it, and teaching others that they must follow it?

The simple answer is because messianic believers want to be accepted by mainstream Judaism. In principle, this is precisely why the book of Galatians was written! Non-Messianic Jews were convincing Messianic gentiles that they needed to follow the manmade TRADITION/LAW of being circumcised in order to be saved. This was and still is a RABBINIC TRADITION! It is manmade, not commanded in scripture, and in fact goes against the commandment of Elohim that EMUNAH [absolute trust/faith] ALONE gives us Salvation! The Jewish Rabbis of today and yesteryear DO hang 'salvation' on breaking THEIR command of not speaking the Name, and that fear adds to the desire of Messianic people to please the Rabbis. The principle is the same as the circumcision issue in Galatians. Sha'ul would disapprove of it, considering He, too, spoke the Name:

“Do I seek to please men? For, if I tried to please men, I would not be a servant of Mashi'akh.” Gal 1:10

But Messianics are rejected, not because of traditions we do not keep, but we are rejected because of our trust in and declaration of the B'sorah of יהוה Yeshua HaMashiakh!

The sad fact is that many believers who live a Torah observant life, that practice many of the customs of Yisra'el, feel like “fake Jews,” because they do not have the acceptance **from man**, and they desire that acceptance, instead of what they should desire, and that is acceptance from יהוה and from His Mashiakh ONLY.

There are some Messianic teachers that teach that Yeshua did not use the Name of יהוה when He spoke, because He was adhering to the rabbinic tradition. This might sound like a good argument when we look at the Gospels and see that Messiah so often referred to יהוה as Abba or Av (Father), or some variation of those. This teaching does not hold up, however, to scrutiny, and just because Yeshua mostly used Abba and Avi when referring to His Father does not mean that using the name יהוה was bad. Yeshua never taught that.

Some Messianic teachers even go so far as to say they can “prove” this, and they use Luke 4:17 and teach that when Yeshua read from the book of YeshaYahu that He said “Adonai”, and it's an open and closed case. This is not only a bad teaching, it is dishonest. These same teachers use a translation from the Greek, and in the Greek, the word used to translate יהוה is Kuriou, a conjugation of the Greek word Kurios, but it is also the same Greek word used to translate Adonai. So there is no way, by reading a Greek manuscript or a translation of a Greek manuscript, that you can “prove” that Yeshua said “Adonai” instead of יהוה. By contrast, the Aramaic Peshitta uses different words to translate Adonai and יהוה. Mara, meaning master, is the Aramaic word used for Adonai in the Hebrew. Marya is the Aramaic word used **only** to translate the Name of Elohim, יהוה. In Luke 4:17 in the Aramaic Peshitta, the word ‘Marya’ is used, which makes sense, because He is reading the scroll of YeshaYahu and in that verse, the name יהוה is what is written in a scroll in a Synagogue.

But more importantly, Messiah had to use the name of יהוה, because it is written in the Torah, and if it was His turn to read, He may have also read the Torah portion, as well as the Haftarah portion. And if He would not have said the Name of יהוה where it appeared in the Word, then He would have sinned by taking away from the Torah, and He was without sin. He also knew that the Name of His Father is יהוה, because it was the same Name that was given to Him.

We also see several verses before He read in the Beit K'nesset, where He quoted verses from the book of D'varim to HaSatan.

And the accuser said to Him, "I will give you all this power and its glory, which are delivered to me, and I give it to whom I please; if therefore you worship me, it will all be yours." Yeshua answered, saying to him, "It is written, 'You shall worship יהוה your Elohim, and Him only you shall serve.'" 9And he brought Him to Yerushalayim and made Him to stand up on the ledge of the Heikhal, and said to Him, "If you are Ben HaElohim, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will command His Malakhim concerning you, to keep watch over you; And they will take you up in their arms, so that even your foot may not strike a stone.' Yeshua answered, saying to him, "It is said, 'You shall not test יהוה your Elohim.'" When the accuser was through with all his temptations, he left Him for a while.

He would not have left out the Name of יהוה when quoting scripture because, again, He would be taking away from the Torah.

So we see from an honest look at the Word of יהוה that Yeshua not only did use the Name of יהוה, but He had to use it, because He could not sin and still be our perfect Khatat sacrifice. He was guiltless of any transgression of the Torah.

The last thing to ponder, then, is why would Yeshua use Abba or Avi so much more than using the Name of יהוה ?

Because those that came before Yeshua, who trusted in and were servants of the Most High, knew Him as their King and their Elohim, and referred to Him by His titles or His Name, which IS a memorial to be remembered by speaking. But Yeshua didn't just love יהוה and have a relationship with Him only as His Elohim. Yeshua came out of His Father, and יהוה IS His Father, His Abba. (Yokhanan 8:42)

When any of us talk about our fathers how do we usually do it? We say 'my dad' did this or 'my dad' used to do that or 'my father' was strict or 'my father' was kind. We would not go around saying "proper name" used to give me allowance or "proper name" used to go to all my baseball games, etc.

Yeshua referred to יהוה and spoke about Him with the intimacy He has with Him as a Son to a Father.

The prophecy that יהוה spoke concerning the B'rit Khadasha and concerning us is this:

And no man shall teach his neighbor, neither his brother, saying, 'Know יהוה ', for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. And I will forgive their wickedness and I will no longer remember their sins'." (Yermi-Yahu 31:34 & Ivrim 8:11)

That knowing is an intimate knowing. Yeshua knows the Father that closely, and He did not only bring us forgiveness of sin, He also brought us the Way and the opportunity to have the same intimacy with Him and with The Father that He shares with His Father.

The reason Yeshua called יהוה Abba and Avi had nothing to do with manmade doctrine, especially doctrine that violates Torah. But it had everything to do with the love and oneness He has with יהוה that He has given to us as well through our trust in Him.

"And because you are sons, Elohim has sent forth HaRu'akh of His Son into your hearts crying, "Abba, Avinu." 7From now on you are not servants, but sons; and if sons, then heirs

of Elohim through Yeshua HaMashi'akh.” (Gal 4:6)

“For you have not received the spirit of bondage, to be in fear again; but you have received HaRu'akh of adoption, whereby we cry “Abba;” “Avinu.” And this Ru'akh bears witness to our spirit, that we are the children of Elohim. And if children, then heirs, heirs of Elohim and joint heirs with Yeshua HaMashi'akh; so that if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with him.” (Rom 8:15)

Do not follow doctrine because it sounds right or because “everyone is doing it”. Do not follow a multitude into error. Search the Scriptures yourself diligently. Pray for wisdom and יהוה will give you understanding in His word. Stand up against doctrine that is not of יהוה and proclaim His Name, His spoken memorial to the world.

“Only Elohim is true, and every man is false; (Rom 3:2)”

(It was the breaking of the command to proclaim His Name that led to not only them but the whole world forgetting how to say His Name. At Bat-Tzion we do not claim to have revelation in the pronunciation of His Name, but we have certainly done our due diligence to discover how to pronounce it, and we believe that we are as close as we can get, with the information we have. And we are teachable. If anyone shows more proof of a different pronunciation, we would be happy to change our Halakha on our pronunciation. But, there has NEVER been an argument presented by anyone, great or small, that can overturn the clear edict of scripture to SAY HIS NAME.)