

## Pronouncing YHWH's Name

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Most scholars agree that the Creator's name is four letters long in Hebrew. This name is often called, "the Tetragrammaton", meaning, "a word of four letters."

In Hebrew, the Tetragrammaton is spelled,  
Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay.  
יהוה

### ***Shemote (Exodus) 20:7***

***7 "You shall not take the name of YHWH your Elohim in vain, for YHWH will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.***

The Third Commandment tells us not to take our Creator's name in vain. That is, it tells us not to take the Tetragrammaton in vain. However, people differ as to what this commandment really means.

Traditional Judaism interprets this to mean we should not speak the Tetragrammaton aloud, but that we should substitute other words for it, such as "Adonai" (אדני), (meaning 'Master of Masters'), or "HaShem" (השם, meaning, 'the Name').

In the study, 'The Set-apart Names,' we explain why this practice, while perhaps well-meaning, is not in keeping with Scripture.

### ***Ruth 2:4***

***4 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "YHWH be with you!" And they answered him, "YHWH bless you!"***

Briefly, in ancient Israel, Israelites were expected to pronounce the Creator's name. In Ruth 2:4, we see the Creator's name being used as an everyday greeting, but also as a blessing.

### ***Bemidbar (Numbers) 6:24-26***

***24 "YHWH bless you and keep you;  
25 YHWH make His face shine upon you,  
And be gracious to you;  
26 YHWH lift up His countenance upon you,  
And give you peace."***

At Numbers 6 and verse 24, in the High Priestly Blessing, the Creator commands us to put His name on His people three separate times, so they can receive their blessing. If His name is not put on them, they do not receive this special blessing.

***Tehillim (Psalms) 91:14***

***14 "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;  
I will set him on high, because he has known My name."***

In Psalms 91 and Verse 14 the Creator tells us He will bless those who know His name, and who call on His name.

There are many more examples of why the Creator wants us to use and to pronounce His name, but these should illustrate the point that He wants us to pronounce His name, and not hide it.

Our purpose here is to explain how we can pronounce the Tetragrammaton. However, this represents a challenge, since so many scholars disagree so sharply as to how the Divine Name should be pronounced.

We will not go into all of the details here, however, we have some tutorials on how to pronounce the basic Hebrew letters (and their associated vowels) on the Nazarene Israel website, [www.nazareneisrael.org](http://www.nazareneisrael.org).

However, just to review, the Hebrew letter Yod (or Yud)

י

is pronounced: yuh, ee or yee, depending on its vowel;  
but basically the letter Yud makes an E, I or Y sound.

The Hebrew letter Hay

ה

is pronounced: ah, eh, or huh (basically it contains an 'h' sound, in combination with whatever other vowels).

The Hebrew letter Vav ו is pronounced vuh, wuh, oh, or oo, depending on its vowel, but basically it gives us a V, a W, an O or a U sound.

And again, the Hebrew letter Hay ה

is basically pronounced like 'huh', 'ah' or 'eh',  
as if it contained an 'h'.

We'll talk about how all these letters might be pronounced together in a moment, but first, let us discuss the Hebrew Text in which our Creator's name is found, because it will show us some important things about how His name might be pronounced.

The Hebrew Text that underlies most mainstream Scripture translations today is called the Hebrew Masoretic Text. It was compiled by a group called 'The Masoretes', which translates roughly to, 'the traditionalists.'

The Masoretes compiled their version of the Text between roughly 700 and 1000 CE, or roughly seven hundred to a thousand years after the Messiah's ministry.

Like English, Hebrew is made up of both consonants and vowels; and, much like English, the pronunciation of letter combinations can change depending on how they are put together.

For example, consider the words:

Through

Cough

Bough

Brought, and

Tough.

These words all contain the letters O-U-G-H, yet they are all pronounced differently. Hebrew can be similar.

The Hebrew Masoretic Text supplies certain vowels with the Tetragrammaton. Scholars differ as to how and when these vowels were put there; but if one pronounces the Tetragrammaton the way it is spelled in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, one gets the pronunciation, "Yehovah."

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Here the Yud with the two dots below it sounds like "Yee."

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The Hay makes an "h" sound, and sometimes an 'O' sound is supplied by adding an additional dot above the Hay and to the left.

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יהוה

The combination of the Vav, its vowel that looks like a small letter T, and the final Hay, sounds like "vah."

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However, this pronunciation is not without problems.

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The first problem is that it requires the artificial insertion of an 'O' sound just after the first letter Hay.

Another problem is that while written Hebrew today uses both consonants and vowels, the vowels were never written down in any document before the Hebrew Masoretic Text.

That is to say that the Masoretic Text, (which was written circa 700 to 1000 CE) is the first Hebrew document on record that uses written vowel points. Many scholars believe that the Masoretes' created these written vowels. Others believe the Masoretes' purpose was to standardize the pronunciation of Hebrew, by writing down vowels that had always been used, but were not recorded because parchment was so expensive, and writing the vowels was much more difficult back in quill-and-ink times. Whatever the case, no existing Hebrew document written prior to the Hebrew Masoretic Text has any written vowel points in it.

For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls were written perhaps some 700 to 1000 years earlier, and there are no written vowel points in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Assuming that the Masoretes simply recorded existing vowel sounds, rather than making the vowel system up, some scholars ask how we can know that the vowels recorded in the Masoretic Text are accurate to the original pronunciations. They cite an old children's game called "Telephone", whereby information is passed by mouth around a circle. After so many children pass the information, it comes out sounding very different than at first.

Along these same lines, we might also note that the Hebrew Masoretic Text disagrees with another ancient version of the Tanach, called the Septuagint.

The Septuagint was originally commissioned by the High Priest back around 300 to 400 BCE, as an official translation of the Hebrew scrolls used by the priests. It was created for use by other Jews, and it was both trusted and widely respected. Since it was an official translation, it should be a perfect translation of the Hebrew texts that were in use by the priests at the time of its translation, some 300 to 400 years before Yeshua.

So if we remember that the Septuagint was an official translation, we can see some surprising things.

The Renewed Covenant (or some say the New Testament) quotes many passages which either do not appear in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, or which appear differently in the Hebrew Masoretic. However, these same passages do appear in the Septuagint; and usually match the Septuagint.

Some scholars insist that since the Renewed Covenant does not match the Hebrew Masoretic Text, that this is proof that the Renewed Covenant is not reliable. They say that since the Renewed Covenant matches the more ancient Greek document, but does not match the more current Hebraic document, this is proof that it cannot be trusted. However, this is generally the opposite of how the accuracy of ancient texts is normally determined. Normally, the earlier a document is, the more authoritative and reliable it is considered to be.

Since the Septuagint was an official translation of the priestly Hebrew Text, and since it is far more ancient than the Hebrew Masoretic Text, it would appear that in reality it is the Hebrew Masoretic Text which is unreliable.

Some scholars see the discrepancy between the Septuagint and the Hebrew Masoretic Text as an indication that the Masoretic Text may possibly have been altered, perhaps in order to undermine the Renewed Covenant.

Sometimes it happens today that believers in Yeshua read where the Renewed Covenant quotes the Tanach (or the Old Testament), and then they go to look up the passages that the Renewed Covenant is quoting, and either they cannot find it, or it reads differently. Sometimes this causes them to lose their faith, because they see the Renewed Covenant as being unreliable, since it does not 'match the Hebrew.'

Many scholars agree that the Masoretic Text was developed over the course of several hundred years, during the time that the Jews were persecuted in Europe. The alleged purpose of developing a 'Masoretic' Text was to standardize the text, correct any errors that may have entered into the Text, and also to help standardize the pronunciation of Hebrew, by either writing down or developing a written system of vowels. However, some scholars suggest that the Masoretes may also have secretly purposed to alter the text, so as to weaken the faith in Yeshua, and strengthen rabbinical traditions. These also point out that the term 'Masoretic' derives from the Hebrew word Masorah (מסורה), which refers to the furtherance and continuation of rabbinical traditions; and we know that the rabbinical tradition is to deny that Yeshua was the Messiah.

Yet while the evidence does seem to indicate that the Hebrew Text has been altered since the time the Septuagint was written, the Hebrew Masoretic Text is nonetheless very valuable as a base text. For these reasons, scholars continue to use it; and we can use it as well, just so long as we check it against the Septuagint.

But how does all of this impact the rabbinical tradition of hiding our Father's name?

Scholars differ as to exactly when and the practice originated and why, but Jewish tradition has become not to pronounce the Creator's name. Some scholars believe that this practice began when the Jews went into Exile in Babylon. The Babylonians considered that the name of their god Marduk was so 'holy' that it was not to be spoken aloud, and they made fun of the Jews for using the name of their Creator in everyday greetings and blessings. The Jews then stopped speaking the Creator's name, so as to keep the Babylonians from taking it in vain.

There are other theories as to how this practice originated, but as we explain in the study, 'The Set-apart Names', our Father wants us to speak His name, and to make it known in all the earth. Therefore, we must never hide it.

Rabbinical tradition is to use the term 'Adonai' (meaning 'Master of Masters') during prayer, and to use 'HaShem' (meaning 'the Name') at all other times. According to rabbinic tradition, the Divine Name is only to be spoken aloud by the High Priest; and even then only once a year. In order to keep the name from being spoken by anyone else, the Divine Name was then hidden

from all but a select few, who were to pass on the correct pronunciation from generation to generation. The Masoretes then put vowel points on the Tetragrammaton which indicated that anyone reading the Text was not to pronounce the name as it was written, but was to pronounce “Adonai” instead.

However, some scholars believe that since the rabbinical custom was to hide the name, and since tradition holds that the true pronunciation was hidden from all but a select few, that the vowel points supplied were intended to disguise the true pronunciation. Either way, since there is much evidence supporting both of these theories, many scholars reject the traditional pronunciation, “Yehovah.”

But if the Masoretes may have put the wrong vowel points on the Creator’s name on purpose, in order to hide His name, or if the vowel points on the Tetragrammaton are only there to remind us to say “Adonai”, then how is our Creator’s Name pronounced?

Because Hebrew pronunciation can change depending on the vowel and letter combinations, the truth is that no one really knows for sure. However, there are several theories that have gained widespread acceptance.

To review, the Hebrew letter Yod (or Yud):

י

is pronounced: yuh, ee or yee, basically an E, I or Y sound.

The Hebrew letter Hay:

ה

is pronounced: ah, eh, or huh (basically an ‘h’ sound).

The Hebrew letter Vav

ו

is pronounced vuh, wuh, oh, or oo; either a V, W, an O, or a U sound.

And again, the Hebrew letter Hay: ה

is basically pronounced like an ‘h’.

Based on this, many scholars accept the following hypothesis as to how to we might pronounce the Divine Name:

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The first letter Yud sounds like “Yee”

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The second letter Hay sounds like ‘-ah’

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The third letter Vav sounds like  
'-oo'

יהוה

And the final Hay sounds like 'eh.'

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This gives a pronunciation

'Yah-oo-eh'

or 'Yahu-eh.'

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This name is often written

in English as 'Yahweh.'

Others suggest 'Yahuweh.'

Other variations exist, and we will discuss one more of those.

It is a common mistake to try to apply English rules of grammar to Hebrew. Let us remember that Hebrew grammar is different than English grammar. Nonetheless, consider the English words, 'Omni-' and 'potent':

Together they are pronounced 'omnipotent', which sounds very different than when the two words are pronounced separately.

One popular variation of the Tetragrammaton is to begin with the name of the tribe of Judah, which is "Yehudah", (or some say "Yahudah"; but "Yehudah").

יהודה

Subtract out the Dalet, which gives a 'D' sound, and one is left with "Yahuwah."

"Yahu-ah"

The spelling is now the same as the Tetragrammaton.

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Whatever the correct pronunciation, we should remember not to place too much emphasis on how to transliterate the spellings into English. There is no truly correct English spelling, since English is not Hebrew or Aramaic. The main thing is for us to learn to read Hebrew, and then to progress from there.

We might also consider another possibility: that there is no one 'correct' pronunciation, per se.

***B'reisheet (Genesis) 2:7***

***7 And YHWH Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.***

Genesis 2 and Verse 7 tells us that YHWH breathed into man the 'breath of life.'  
Some suggest that יהוה is our 'Breath of Life'; and that the sound of His name is supposed to approximate human the sound of human breathing.

According to this theory, the Yod-Hay sounds perhaps like "yee-ah", or an inhaling sound.

The Vav-Hay sounds perhaps like "oo-eh" (or an exhaling sound).  
"yee-ah", "oo-eh"

(inhale) "yee-ah"  
(exhale) "oo-eh"

(inhale) "yee-ah"  
(exhale) "oo-ah" (alternate sound)

We might emphasize that this is only a hypothesis, and that no one really knows how to pronounce the Divine Name. However, if this hypothesis is true, then perhaps all of the softer pronunciations, Yahweh, Yahuweh, and Yahuwah might be equally valid, since these all essentially approximate the sound of human breathing.

In all honesty, no one really knows how to pronounce the Divine Name, as the original pronunciation at the time of the Burning Bush was not recorded in writing. YHWH is usually provides very specific clues about points that can be known; and yet the exact pronunciation of His name has been hidden from us. Could it be that YHWH allowed the pronunciation of His name to be hidden from us, so that He can see how His people treat each other when confusion exists?

***Yochanan Aleph 1 John 4:8***

***8 He who does not love does not know Elohim, for Elohim is love.***

First John 4 and verse 8 tells us that YHWH is love; so if we have a deep, abiding relationship in Him, then our walk should reflect this love.

May YHWH give all of us this patience and love, for every brother who is genuinely seeking to keep the Father's Instructions, by virtue of his faith in the Messiah.

In the Messiah's name,

Amein.