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QH 7.2 WHY YOU SHOULD USE THE NAME OF YHWH AND NO OTHER –
A LETTER TO A FRIEND

Preface:

Many of the people I know think nothing of using the terms *God*, *Lord* or *HaShem* instead of speaking the true name of our Father YHWH. Since the time I first learned of my Father's name, I ceased using anything else. I didn't want to, nor did I see the need to. I've since realized that others do not see things the same way I do. I've mentioned this to some of my friends and have received varying responses as to why they continue to use these terms. But I never had the ability to explain to them why the majority of people use these terms or, more importantly, why we shouldn't. That's why I was elated when my husband had the opportunity to have this same conversation with our good friend, Jim.

Jim was a volunteer who used to go into the prison unit where my husband lived so that the Sabbath-keeping community there could gather for Sabbaths and holy days. Since there was so little time on Sabbaths for deep conversations, my husband wrote a letter to Jim about the use of YHWH's name. He wrote an excellent letter and one which so clearly explained both the Jewish and Christian history and traditions behind the use of the name, *God*. This letter made a difference in Jim's life.

I am sharing it with you in the hopes that it will make a difference in yours as well.

Shalom, Lisa

Dear Jim,

In the name of YHWH Avinu I wish you great peace, my friend.

Thanks for coming yesterday so we could have a service, and thanks for your counsel on my current troubles. I listened to you and appreciate your level-headedness. I enjoyed your message to us as well and am anxious to hear your continuation this coming Shabbath – a double blessing.

I'm sure you have already guessed the main reason for this letter, so let me get to it. I don't know how "loquacious" I can be, but I will try. Regardless of the result, you are my brother, and you have my brotherly love – I cannot be moved from that position.

As you so aptly described yesterday, this is an issue of scripture and reason. It is a matter of Torah law – not of "feelings". Yesterday, when I told you that some of the brethren had bridled at your use of "God", you flushed beet red. I had accidentally triggered strong feelings in you with my words. That mortified me. I felt so bad for you, that I had embarrassed or angered you, or caused you discomfort in front of brother Wooten. It was absolutely not my intent to do so. I apologize, Jim, and please forgive me. This issue, to me, is not one of feelings nor is it one of speculation. It is a clear issue of the commands of YHWH in Torah. As such, I am not free to explain or try to reason it away, no matter how I or anyone else might "feel" about it, and no matter the traditions or conventions of modern-day society. Most of what believers in Yehoshua do is contrary to the world's comfort and traditions, and much of the way a true believer must live is seen as impractical or difficult (or foolish or impossible? 1st Cor.1:18-19). That is no excuse for us to refuse doing so, if indeed we are his and profess to walk (*halak*) as he walked. We must obey the Torah whenever possible, just as he did, and interpret it primarily

according to his *halakha* (the manner in which one does – “walks” – the Torah), regardless of our feelings of what the world thinks and does.

Yehoshua is quoted in two places, speaking and teaching his views of men’s traditions and how they should affect our *halakha* (Matt. 15 & Mk.7). He does not condemn tradition and “oral Torah”, unless men have twisted it to conflict with the clear meaning of the original written Torah. In fact, he says in another place that the leaders “sit in Moshe’s seat” and that we should do as they say (or in the Hebrew – Matthew, “as he says”). His only qualification of this is when man’s traditions and teachings are contrary to that of the Torah. That is the overarching principle for determining the *halakha* of a believer in Yehoshua. A man cannot serve two masters. Throughout the history of Judaism (and Christianity), teachers, sages and rabbis have differed both between themselves and with outsiders in their opinions and instruction. This is accepted as inevitable. The solution for it has always been that each person should follow the main body of teaching for whichever sect they belong to, then give absolute primacy to the particular teacher or master they personally follow in details and practice of their faith. So, while we learn much from others and do our best to abide the teachings of mainstream and tradition, our Master and Teacher is Yehoshua and his *halakha* trumps all others.

That said, there are roughly four reasons why people use the name “God”, instead of using the name YHWH.

1. The Catholic Church, between approximately 700 A.D. – 1000 A.D., spread Christianity throughout Northern Europe and Scandinavia. The Vatican primarily used the word *theos* (Greek) or *deos* (Latin) for YHWH’s name. The pagans and heathens of Northern Europe had a pantheon of deities, one of which was *Gott*. The Catholics, in subjugating these people and converting them, allowed them the syncretistic method of transplanting that foreign deity’s name into the religion of the Elohim of Abraham, Itzhak and Yaakob. The Catholics interest was in power, money, and in conquering the dumb masses, not in linguistic or doctrinal purity. Do a Google search on *Gott*, *Gut*, *Gud*, *Gad*, *God*, and “history and etymology of pagan names”, and see what you find. The Encyclopedia Britannica and Americana also have info on these. The Catholic church is big on this practice of blending religions for their own profit. I have seen videos and read articles on Catholic syncretism, especially in Central and South America. They bring dead bodies into the churches or sit in graveyards and give them booze, food, cigarettes, and a party on the “Day of the Dead” (Oct.31st) each year. The Vatican allows this as long as they pay tithes. You would not condone this, would you? “God” is not a “title” when used in place of YHWH. It is the proper name of a Teutonic / Norse deity. Long before that, it was the name of an ancient Aramaic deity – one of many and not supreme. These two deities are actually one and the same. That is a fact, and the use of its name in place of YHWH was approved by the Roman Catholic Church. Neither time nor tradition change that fact.
2. “To call on His name means only to call on His authority”, is another reason people cite for not using the name YHWH. First of all, this is only half true. As you so aptly pointed out yesterday, there is power in the spoken word. YHWH, (not God), created the universes not by a thought or gesture, but by a spoken word. Different spoken words have differing effects. When He said, *Ehyeh Ohr*, light came to exist, not grass. He is the One who gave power and emphasis to spoken words and names. His name has a meaning. So does “God”. To use one or the other has differing effects. In His Torah, He specifically commanded us to “call on His name”, and He identified that name very specifically as יהוה – YHWH. He said in audible words (to a man He called by name [Moshe] audibly) that this would be His memorial name to His people Yisrael forever. This is an unambiguous, clear command of Torah which is repeated hundreds of times. We are physical beings that communicate with physical sound, in His image. When I speak and say, “Jim said you should...” or “The warden told me...”, I speak in the authority of the one whose name I use. If I knowingly use the wrong name, I confer that authority onto someone else, or dilute it. Some names even insult the person we speak to or in the authority of. The name, “God”, is an insult to YHWH, when applied to Him. He says so. Who am I to argue with Him? The name YHWH means, “He who exists”. The name, “God”, does not. It means *Fortune*, or *Chance*.

There is also a logical absurdity in reasoning that a name is only a claiming of authority. In Exodus 32:4-5, Aharon and the people made a golden calf and worshipped it. You will agree that this was wrong, an abomination, and idolatry. But notice, in these two verses they said the calf was YHWH “who brought

you out of the land of Mitzraim (Egypt).” Tell me, Jim, think – what is the difference between using the name of YHWH on a thing of idolatry, and using the name of an idol (“God”) on the personage (or authority) of YHWH in His essence? I can see none. Essentially, it is the same thing: $3 \times 10 = 30$. But $10 \times 3 = 30$ as well. The sequence in which you arrange the equation results in the same product. YHWH gave Yisrael His name specifically in order for them to use it and speak it in calling upon His authority, and there is no other name we are given to use. That is the Torah. To accept the traditions of men in exchange for His clear command is an abrogation of Yehoshua’s *halakha* and authority, and it is idolatry.

3. The name is “ineffable”, that is to say, *unspeakable*. Whereas the previous two reasons for not using His name are essentially Christian in origin, reasons three and four are purely Jewish ones. Obviously, literally taken, this statement is untrue. I can say His name. The statement about ineffability really intends me to understand that I should not. Why? Because I am unclean, unworthy and have no authority to do so. That is the implication. I disagree with that reasoning. Historically, the people of Yisrael all spoke His name until the return from Babylon, around 516 B.C. This is evidenced by the Psalms, Proverbs, and several books of the Prophets. These men used His name with care and reverence – as should we. In those books, all Yisrael are enjoined emphatically to “call upon the name of YHWH”. In fact, in Yoel 2 we are told that this is a method of salvation. The traditional prohibition against speaking the name was first begun in Babylon during the exile and was (and still is) contested by many. The Karaite Jews and others still call upon His true name and no other. The “Great Assembly” under Ezra and those who came after him were apparently so scared the nation of Israel would mess up and sin again, leading to another exile, that they forbade use of the name of YHWH by any except themselves. In that way, the world largely forgot His name for centuries. Jeremiah 23:26-27. Jim, I am a disciple of Yehoshua Hamashiach, washed clean in his own precious blood, made worthy by his sacrifice on my behalf, and given his authority to do righteous and wondrous acts on his behalf on this earth. If I deny this, I am not his. No one can take that cleanness, worthiness, and authority away except he himself or his Father. They have promised they won’t do that, and I believe them. No one on earth can convince me that I am not to speak my own Father’s name with His authority, when He Himself has commanded me to do so. It is not “ineffable” for me.
4. This last reason is rather esoteric and you probably don’t know it. Ironically, it is the original textual reasoning the rabbis used to begin this whole tradition of hiding the name. It is how Great Sages of Israel justified the prohibition, and later Christianity blindly followed along without ever questioning the practice. By the time of the Church Fathers and Constantine ‘The Great’, the use of Hebrew had fallen into disrepute and was considered “Judaistic,” its learning was forbidden by the church. So, this original reason for the prohibition itself was even forgotten.

In Exodus 3:15 Torah says, “...this is My name forever.” The word “forever” in this verse is “l’olam” (לעולם). Normally throughout scripture this word has an extra letter, a vav (לעולם), though there are a few instances like this in the most ancient parts of Torah where it is dropped. In this form, without the vav and with differing vowel points, the word can also mean “hidden.” So, in an attempt to keep evil and untaught people from inadvertently or deliberately profaning the name of the Most-High, the sages of the Great Assembly opined that the use of “olam” without a vav in Shemoth 3:15 actually means, “hide the name”, or “This is My name to be hidden”. In the Talmud (Shemos Rabbah 3:7; Peshachim 50a), it says that, “Based upon this verse, we never pronounce the name as written”. That is how this whole thing got started and is ultimately why you do not exclusively use the name YHWH today. It is that simple. It is a vile, though possibly well-intended, instance of the traditions of men being allowed to override the clear commands of YHWH. There is even a great Talmudic argument against the reasoning they used for their prohibition in this verse. It is accepted by both Jewish and Christian rules of scriptural exegesis that a treatment applied to one word or verse should also apply to the same words or similar verses similarly situated elsewhere in scripture. If you used this rule with every instance in scripture of “l’olam” that is missing the vav, you wouldn’t like the outcome – YHWH Himself would need to be deliberately and permanently “hidden” from the world – including instances of His power and miracles. For example, Ex.15:18 (the Song of Moshe) would then read, “YHWH shall reign hidden forever” (heaven forbid!). This would be very bad. From a scholarly point of view, it is poor exegesis to suppose a missing vav alone in a single word would imply a thing clearly contradicted by the direct commands of Torah and, consistently applied to the same form of the word

“I’olam” elsewhere in Torah, it would make it a mockery of YHWH Himself. The whole idea of this is untenable.

Anyway, now you know the foundational reasons for what you do regarding the name of YHWH, and why we refuse to use the name “God”. It is, quite simply, forbidden and idolatrous.

For every positive (an aseh) command, there is usually a negative one (a lav). The negative command that is corollary to Ex.3:15, is Ex.23:13. One says what name we should call the Creator of the universe, and the other says what names we should not call Him, and indeed, that those other names should “not even be found in your mouth”. Quite obviously, this command is not about calling upon “only His authority”. Neither was I Kings 18:21-39 “only calling upon His authority”. Maybe you can read that scripture with new eyes.

There is an exegetical device used in scripture called a “kal v’chomer”. It is used several times in Torah, and Yehoshua our Messiah used it often. It means, “from lesser to greater” – if a thing is so in small issues, how much moreso in greater issues. So then, according to this rule, if “there is only one name given among men by which we can be saved” – Yehoshua HaMashiach, how much moreso would this be true of his Father’s name? He is absolutely One – Echad. And Jim, even if the whole world goes astray in this matter and rejects these truths, does that give us leave to follow? (Ex.23:2)

The above are the Torah on this subject, according to the halakha of Yehoshua. These are not based upon my “feelings”, but upon scripture and history. I can conceive of no counter-argument from Torah that would contradict this understanding without torturously twisting its clear meanings and commands. You said we must learn and obey Torah. I agree.

I have not written all of this to you expecting to persuade you. Does that surprise you? Neither have I written all of this to you in the hopes that, as you go on striving not to offend Christians and Jews by using the literal name of YHWH in their presence, you will also strive not to offend us here by using the name “God.” I expect that you already have decided to appease us with that courtesy on your own. Thank you for that. I also haven’t written all of this because I have nothing else to do – I have loads of work to do and I stay busy. I think I am compelled by YHWH’s Spirit to write this letter. I certainly hope so, and that it is not my own. Personally, I don’t expect your mind to change at present. No offense meant, Jim. Everyone is given the ability to accept only so much truth at a time, it seems. Some only accept Shabbath, or festivals, or names, or other things. A level of comfort is found, and to go beyond that level into other new things isn’t easy. From the flush on your face yesterday and from the arguments you presented (which I was surprised at, considering your extremely high level of intelligence and learning), I perceived that I had breached and exceeded your limits and comfort level. From experience, I don’t much expect positive results once these barriers have been reached and exceeded. But that is in YHWH’s hands, not mine. It is between you and He.

Again, please forgive me if I upset or embarrassed you in any way. I would never wittingly do that to you or anyone. I only meant to explain to you what I thought you needed to know before it became an issue with the community. Everyone really likes you here, Jim. When you leave, we speak about your next coming until you get here. We pray for you daily and hope good things for you. We are looking forward impatiently to next Shabbath and listening further to your teaching.

Shalom rav, achi,
Ovadyah