

The Ineffable Name of Deity

From "The History and Symbolism of Royal Arch Masonry", by Edward R. Graham

The greatest mystery of the Old Testament is the name of the Lord, which He Himself revealed to Moses from the burning bush. Of all the symbols of Royal Arch Masonry, none are as important or of such sublimity as the **Ineffable** (incommunicable, indescribable, unutterable, beyond explanation) **Name of Deity**, represented by a Hebrew Tetragrammaton. The Tetragrammaton (four-letter word) consists of four Hebrew letters, Yod, he, voh, and he, corresponding to the English letters as **JHVH**. As the Hebrew alphabet consists entirely of consonants, the vowels necessary to pronounce the words are supplied by the reader, who had previously been instructed as to what they were.

As the true pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton was forbidden to the Hebrews, it was lost over time. According to Jewish tradition, once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest of Israel went alone into the Holy of Holies of the Temple and there pronounced the **Sacred Name**. While the High Priest did this, the priests outside the Temple chanted and the people prostrated themselves. It was said the effect of correctly saying God's name would cause the Earth to shake, so the people gathered outside the Temple always knew the exact moment when **The Word** was spoken. The High Priest passed on the pronunciation to his successor under a binding oath to never repeat it except as proscribed.

Tradition is that the High Priest was killed by the Chaldeans during the destruction of the first Temple before he could pass on the correct pronunciation. Consequently, **The Word** was lost. It is said that because **The Word** was lost, the shekinah never appeared in the second Temple.

The shekinah, or Divine Glory, was a brightness, or cloud, which appeared over the mercy seat of the Ark of Covenant at the dedication of the first Temple and remained there until its destruction. To this day, devout Jews substitute the word Adonai when reading the Tetragrammaton. It is usually pronounced in English as Jehovah. There are several other pronunciations used on occasion, such as Yahweh, Yahveh, Yihvoh, and Yaheveh. The Tetragrammaton is past, present, and future meaning: "He who was, He who is, and He who will be."

To a Royal Arch Mason, the exact pronunciation of **The Word**, or Great and Sacred Name, is an academic problem. Regardless of the lost correct pronunciation, the symbolic meaning is the same. It is the symbol of all that is highest and best in Freemasonry, the light which shines in the dark, the recognition that one has finally added a spiritual state so that he is now a "complete man." He has finally completed his work upon the "living stone."

"And God spake unto Moses and said unto him, I am the LORD:

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" Exodus 6: 2-3.

It is impossible to understand the total picture of Masonic symbolism without the Royal Arch Degree, for it is only in this degree that the story is completed. However, this degree contains much more than the recovery of **The Word**. It is the most symbolic degree in Masonry.