

CHAPTER X

THE NAME OF GOD

1. Primitive men attached much importance to names, for to them the name of a thing indicated its nature, and through the name one could obtain mastery over the thing or person named. Accordingly, the name of God was considered to be the manifestation of His being; by invoking it man could obtain some of His power; and the place where that name was called became the seat of His presence. Therefore the name must be treated with the same reverential awe as the Deity Himself. None dare approach the Deity, nor misuse the Name. The pious soul realized the nearness of the Deity in hearing His name pronounced. Finally, the different names of God reflect the different conceptions of Him which were held in various periods.¹

2. The Semites were not like the Aryan nations, who beheld the essence of their gods in the phenomena of nature such as light, rain, thunder, and lightning, — and gave them corresponding names and titles. The more intense religious emotionalism of the Semites² perceived the Godhead rather as a power working from within, and accordingly gave it such names as *El* (“the Mighty One”), *Eloha* or *Pahad* (“the Awful One”), or *Baal* (“the Master”). *Elohim*, the plural form of *Eloha*, denoted originally the godhead as divided into a number of gods or godly beings, that is, polytheism. When

¹ See Cheyne's Dict. Bibl., art. Name and Names with Bibliography; Jacob: *Im Namen Gottes*; Heitmueller, *Im Namen Jesu*, 1903, p. 24-25. The Name for the Lord occurs Lev. XXIV, 11, 16; Deut. XXVIII, 58; Geiger, *Urschrift*, 261 f.

² See Baudissin, *Stud. z. Sem. Religionsgesch.*, I, 47; 177; Robinson Smith: *Religion of the Semites*; Max Mueller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, I, 336-374.

it was applied to God, however, it was generally understood as a *unity*, referring to one undivided Godhead, for Scripture regarded monotheism as original with mankind. While this view is contradicted by the science of comparative religion, still the ideal conception of religion, based on the universal consciousness of God, postulates one God who is the aim of all human searching, a fact which the term Henotheism fails to recognize.¹

3. For the patriarchal age, the preliminary stage in the development of the Jewish God-idea, Scripture gives a special name for God, *El Shaddai* — “the Almighty God.” This probably has a relation to *Shod*, “storm” or “havoc” and “destruction,” but was interpreted as supreme Ruler over the celestial powers.² The name by which God revealed Himself to Moses and the prophets as the God of the covenant with Israel is JHVH (Jahveh). This name is inseparably connected with the religious development of Judaism in all its loftiness and depth. During the period of the Second Temple this name was declared too sacred for utterance, except by the priests in certain parts of the service, and for mysterious use by specially initiated saints. Instead, *Adonai* — “the Lord” — was substituted for it in the Biblical reading, a usage which has continued for over two thousand years. The meaning of the name in pre-Mosaic times may be inferred from the fiery storms which accompanied each theophany in the various Scriptural passages, as well as from the root *havah*, which means “throw down” and “overthrow.”³

¹ See J. E., art. God. Comp. also Encycl. of Religion and Ethics, art. God. Primitive and Biblical; Name of God, Jewish.

² Gen. XVII, 11; Ex. VI, 3, and commentators; Gen. R. XLVI. The Book of Job, where the name *Shaddai* is constantly used, refers to the patriarchal age.

³ Ex. III, 14, and commentators, espec. Dillmann. Comp. art. Jahveh in Prot. Realencyc. and Cheyne's Dict. Bible, art. *Names*, § 109 ff., where different etymologies are given.

To the prophets, however, the God of Sinai, enthroned amid clouds of storm and fire, moving before His people in war and peace, appeared rather as the God of the Covenant, without image or form, unapproachable in His holiness. As the original meaning of JHVH had become unintelligible, they interpreted the name as "the ever present One," in the sense of *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*, "I shall be whatever (or wherever) I am to be"; that is, "I am ever ready to help." Thus spoke God to Moses in revealing His name to him at the burning bush.¹

4. The prophetic genius penetrated more and more into the nature of God, recognizing Him as the Power who rules in justice, mercy, and holiness. This process brought them to identify JHVH, the God of the covenant, with the One and only God who overlooks all the world from his heavenly habitation, and gives it plan and purpose. At the same time, all the prophets revert to the covenant on Sinai in order to proclaim Israel as the herald and witness of God among the nations. In fact, the God of the covenant proclaimed His universality at the very beginning, in the introduction to the Decalogue: "Ye shall be Mine own peculiar possession from among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine. And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."² In other words, — you have the special task of mediator among the nations, all of which are under My dominion.

5. In the Wisdom literature and the Psalms the God of the covenant is subordinated to the universality of JHVH as Creator and Ruler of the world. In a number of the Psalms and in some later writings the very name JHVH was avoided probably on account of its particularistic tinge. It was surrounded more and more with a certain mystery. Instead, God as the "Lord" is impressed on the consciousness and adoration of men, in all His sublimity and in absolute unity.

¹ Ex. III, 14.

² Ex. XIX, 5, 6.

The "Name" continues its separate existence only in the mystic lore. The name *Jehovah*, however, has no place whatsoever in Judaism. It is due simply to a misreading of the vowel signs that refer to the word *Adonai*, and has been erroneously adopted in the Christian literature since the beginning of the sixteenth century.¹

6. Perhaps the most important process of spiritualization which the idea of God underwent in the minds of the Jewish people was made when the name JHVH as the proper name of the God of the covenant was given up and replaced by *Adonai* — "the Lord." As long as the God of Israel, like other deities, had His proper name, he was practically one of them, however superior in moral worth. As soon as He became *the* Lord, that is, the only real God over all the world, a distinctive proper noun was out of place. Henceforth the name was invested with a mysterious and magic character. It became ineffable, at least to the people at large, and its pronunciation sinful, except by the priests in the liturgy. In fact, the law was interpreted so as directly to forbid this utterance.² Thus JHVH is no longer the national God of Israel. The Talmud guards against the very suspicion of a "Judaized God" by insisting that every benediction to Him as "God the Lord" must add "King of the Universe" rather than the formula of the Psalms, "God of Israel."³

7. The Midrash makes a significant comment on the words of the Shema: "Why do the words, 'the Lord is our God' precede the words, 'the Lord is One'? Does not the particularism of the former conflict with the universalism of the latter sentence? No. The former expresses the idea that the Lord is 'our God' just so far as His name is more intertwined

¹ See Prot. Enc., art. Jahveh, p. 530 f.

² See J. E., art. Adonai; Bousset, l. c., 352 f.

³ Ber. 40 b. On the alleged "Judaisierung des Gottesbegriffs," see Weber, l. c., 148-158.

with our history than with that of any other nation, and that we have the greater obligation as His chosen people. Wherever Scripture speaks of the God of Israel, it does not intend to limit Him as the universal God, but to emphasize Israel's special duty as His priest-people."¹

8. Likewise is the liturgical name "God of our fathers" far from being a nationalistic limitation. On the contrary, the rabbis single out Abraham as the missionary, the herald of monotheism in its march to world-conquest. For his use of the term, "the God of heaven and the God of the earth"² they offer a characteristic explanation: "Before Abraham came, the people worshiped only the God of heaven, but Abraham by winning them for his God brought Him down and made Him also the God of the earth."³

9. Reverence for the Deity caused the Jew to avoid not only the utterance of the holy Name itself, but even the common use of its substitute *Adonai*. Therefore still other synonyms were introduced, such as "Master of the universe," "the Holy One, blessed be He," "the Merciful One," "the Omnipotence" (*ha Geburah*),⁴ "King of the kings of kings" (under Persian influence—as the Persian ruler called himself the King of Kings);⁵ and in Hasidean circles it became customary to invoke God as "our Father" and "our Father in heaven."⁶ The rather strange appellations for God, "Heaven"⁷ and (dwelling) "Place" (*ha Makom*) seem to originate in certain formulas of the oath. In the latter name the rabbis even found hints of God's omnipresence: "As space — *Makom* — encompasses all things, so does God encompass the world instead of being encompassed by it."⁸

¹ Sifre to Deut. VI, 4.

² Gen. XXIV, 3.

³ Gen. R. XXIV, 3.

⁴ Shab. 87 a, 89 b; Mek. Yithro IV.

⁵ See J. E., art. Alenu.

⁶ See J. E., art. *Abba* and Names of God; Weber, l. c., 148 f.; Bousset, II, 356-361; Schechter: *Aspects*, II, 21-28.

⁷ See J. E., art. Heaven; Levy, W. B.: "Shamayim."

⁸ See Pes. X, 5; Ber. 16 b; Ab. Zar. 40 b; Gen. R. LXVIII, 9, referring

10. The rabbis early read a theological meaning into the two names JHVH and *Elohim*, taking the former as the divine attribute of *mercy* and the latter as that of *justice*.¹ In general, however, the former name was explained etymologically as signifying eternity, "He who is, who was, and who shall be." Philo shows familiarity with the two attributes of justice and mercy, but he and other Alexandrian writers explained JHVH and *Ehyeh* metaphysically, and accordingly called God, "the One who is," that is, the Source of all existence. Both conceptions still influence Jewish exegesis and account for the term "the Eternal" sometimes used for "the Lord."

to Gen. XXVIII, 11 and Ex. XXXIII, 21; P. d. R. El. XXXV; Pes. Rab. 104 a; comp. LXX, Ex. XXIV, 10; see also Siegfried: *Philo*, p. 202, 204, 217; Schechter, l. c., 26, 34. The passage in Mekilta on Ex. XVII, 7, which refers *Makom* to the Sanhedrin (after Deut. XVII, 8), seems originally to have been a marginal note belonging to Ex. XXI, 13, where *Makom* is the equivalent of *Makam*, a place of refuge, and put here at the wrong place by an error; — Against Schechter, l. c. 27 note 1, Bousset (p. 591) thinks that *ha Makom* for God is Persian, where both space and time were deified. See Spiegel: *Eranisches Alterthum*, II, 15 f.

¹ See Gen. R. XII, 15; XXX, 3; Targum to Psalm LVI, 11; comp. Philo, I, 496; Siegfried, l. c., 203, 213.