

NAMES AND POWER  
THE CONCEPT OF SECRET NAMES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

By

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Dedicated to John Pumphrey and Virgil Teall

I hope I make you proud

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“The secret things belong to YHWH, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.”--Deuteronomy 29:28

“I will disclose to you, O Gilgāmesh, things that are hidden, and I will relate to you the secrets of the gods.”--Gilgāmesh XI line 9

A lever is one of the six simple machines in physics. It is a plane placed upon a point, called a fulcrum, that when used can multiply the amount of mechanical force that one object exerts on another object. A first-class lever has a fulcrum located between the inert force and the exerting force, which causes a seesaw effect. However, it is possible for the seesaw effect to result in a state of static equilibrium. Archimedes was the first to describe the laws of the lever and states, “Magnitudes are in equilibrium at distances reciprocally proportional to their weights.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the system is in balance when the fulcrum is placed in such a way that allows the weights of the two objects to become equal. In the Ancient Near East, the world is the system in equilibrium. In a world where deluges were common and the prophets preached order against chaos, the system is dependent upon all three objects—inert and exerting forces and fulcrum--to keep the seesaw world in balance. On opposite ends of the lever of balance, names and power remain in a state of equilibrium that is dependent solely on the fulcrum of secrecy.

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<sup>1</sup> E. J. Dijksterhuis, *Archimedes*, trans., C. Dikshoorn (Princeton Princeton University Press, 1987), 291.

A myth is a well-developed story or legend that is usually central to a cult, religion, or culture. Folklore, however, consist of common stories and concepts that groups of people hold as sacred or educational. Folklore is not necessarily a part of the official religion; however, myth makers and religious leaders incorporate folklore into religion and legends. Sometimes this incorporation is unintentional and many times the authors of religion incorporate folklore in order for the audience to relate to the story. In an area such as the Ancient Near East, folklore travels from one society to the next. The migration of folklore is generally a result of the migration and interaction with different people in the area. The spreading of folklore is also a result of the common background and topography that much of the Ancient Near East shares. From this widespread folklore, the concepts of secrecy, names, and power are traceable throughout the myth and stories of each culture.

### **Secrecy in the Ancient Near East**

Secrecy in the Ancient Near East is a common concept, and it is an essential component of many myths and folklore. Certain types of knowledge are accessible only to certain people and to certain gods, and therefore, are secret since they are either extremely precious or extremely dangerous. In Akkadian, the idea of secrecy is conveyed with different words of similar meaning. For instance, the *Assyrian Dictionary* defines *niširtu* as: “1. arcane, secret, 2. treasures, 3. fortification.”<sup>2</sup> *Niširtu* describes things that are hidden by man or gods, or an object of treasure, or an area of magic and omens that are generally kept secret; also, the dictionary states that the word is used with

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<sup>2</sup> *The Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 11 Part II, s.v. “*niširtu*”

reference to “a body of exclusive or special knowledge, expertise, or lore.”<sup>3</sup> Another example from the *Assyrian Dictionary* is the word *pirištu*, which the dictionary defines as: “1. secret plot, secret matter, 2. protected lore, specialized knowledge, 3. inner council.”<sup>4</sup> The dictionary states that *pirištu* refers to “recondite knowledge perceived by humans” or “cosmic knowledge kept by gods.”<sup>5</sup> Like *niširtu*, *pirištu* refers to hidden knowledge, but, more specifically, it refers to secret knowledge that the gods have hidden and may or may not reveal to human beings.

Likewise, the Hebrew Bible has many different words that describe the concept of secrecy, such as לֵט (lāṭ) and סֵתֶר (sēter). לֵט (lāṭ) is used throughout Exodus to describe the secret arts employed by the various magicians in Egypt. The *Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, or BDB, defines לֵט (lāṭ) as “secrecy, mystery.”<sup>6</sup> Like *niširtu*, לֵט (lāṭ) is used to describe dangerous, magical arts that should only be employed by the appropriate practitioners. The BDB states that סֵתֶר (sēter) means “covering, hiding-place, or secrecy.”<sup>7</sup> It generally refers to physical hiding places, but it also can mean the secret knowledge held by gods for their dangerous and precious capabilities. Clearly, both the Hebrew Bible and Akkadian authors held secrecy as an important component of human knowledge.

How, then, does secrecy become the fulcrum on which the balance of chaos and order rests; and how do the concepts of power and names become two forces for equilibrium? Essentially, secrecy acts upon the two forces in order to keep power and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *The Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 12, s.v. “*pirištu*”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. לֵט

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., s.v. סֵתֶר



names in balance. Secret knowledge determines who is highest on the hierarchy of power, and secret names are employed to keep the power of names from being misused. An explanation of the hierarchy of power and the significance of names will aid in understanding these concepts.

### **The Hierarchy of Power**

The order of the world is based upon structure that the gods set. In the Ancient Near East, the creator god, or the god of secrets, normally sets kingship and laws for “heaven”; under the creator god is a court, including angels or lesser deities.<sup>8</sup> To order human society based on this heavenly court structure, the human ruler must obtain secret knowledge. In many cases, such as Moses in Exodus and the Code of Hammurabi, their respective gods, YHWH or Shamash, give the laws to the leader in order to organize society. Thus, power exists within this hierarchy in order to keep balance. The gods’ hierarchy has a ruler, generally the creator, who has the greatest amount of power; he is normally the god who holds the most secret knowledge. Under that god, all the lesser gods exist and perform different deeds and actions. In many mythologies, there are lesser spirits or deities that are present under these gods and the lesser spirits control different natural phenomena. These lesser gods interact with the human world in different ways in the form of demons or nature spirits, and folklore and incantations were written about their activities.

The gods in the upper echelons of the hierarchy also interact with humans. Two examples are Ishtar’s struggles with Gilgamesh and Anat’s attempt to woo Aqhat. Many

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<sup>8</sup> Sometimes it is not the creator god, but the god of the city or the god of the ruler. However, this does not alter the significance of the secrets passed because each deity holds secrets over the domain in which he/she rules. Many times the creator god or the different city gods are depicted as the god of secrets.

times, the creator god extends his creation to earth and creates human kind, as well as the gods. The power structure is then set that humans are lesser in power than the gods, even though humans tend to win battles against the lesser gods. As the creator god establishes this hierarchy and promulgates laws, sometimes through names, the power structure is equal on earth. The king, pharaoh, or queen is the creator, who is closer to the divine than any other human through secret knowledge and has power over the entire domain. The human society mimics the godly court with the monarch as creator, whose subjects are lesser, and whose slaves or peasants are lowest in the power structure.

The hierarchical court structure “names” different roles for the people using polar opposites. Through naming the different roles, the creator or king binds that role to the person or object and establishes order. If the binding is reversed, chaos generally ensues. In this world view, poor are usually destined to be poor, and the rich are destined to be rich. Human life is a matter of destinies mapped out by the higher gods. Therefore, when prophetic literature describes a world of chaos, it describes a reversal of any order given through the gods or through laws, which allows scholars to view what roles the population views as the most important. For example, Isaiah 3:24 states, “Instead of perfume there will be a stench; and instead of a sash, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth; instead of beauty, shame.”<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Amos 2:14-16 states, “Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain their strength, nor shall the mighty save their lives; those who handle the bow shall not stand, and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves, nor shall those who ride horses save their lives; and those who are stout of heart among the mighty shall

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<sup>9</sup> Isa. 3:24 NRSV (New Revised Standard Version).

flee away naked in that day, says the LORD.”<sup>10</sup> The two Hebrew Bible examples show that chaos ensues as the god removes order. Roles reverse, and the hierarchy of power is no more, which tips the seesaw and ends the delicate balance.

### **What is in a Name?**

In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the question is asked: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare did not accurately describe names. His concern was that the essence of the object or person was not in the name but in the person. In the Ancient Near East, the name was opposite of what Shakespeare believed because it contained the soul of the being that it inhabited. The meaning of the name was a binding on the object or person, and the person or object forever had to live up to the fate defined by the name. This generally means that the name is a symbol of power given by someone higher on the hierarchy. When a being who is higher on the hierarchy of power interacts with a lower being, the true name of the higher must be kept secret in order to keep the system in balance. If the inferior being with less power controls the name of the higher, he or she controls that being and everything within that being’s domain, including everything the being has named. This is an upheaval of power that can lead to chaos.

In the Ancient Near East, the name is the soul and essence of the person who receives it, and the one who names binds the meaning of the name to the person as a fate or destiny. The only way that the fate or destiny can change is if a creature of higher power changes the name. As long as the name of the being exists, the being will exist

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<sup>10</sup> Am. 2: 14-16 NRSV.

<sup>11</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, eds. William G. Clark and William A. Wright (London: Dempsey Parr, 2000), II.ii.43-44.

throughout eternity as part of the fabric of the divine order. The concept was common throughout the Ancient Near East and is found within the Hebrew Bible. Reiterer states, “Thus *šem* constitutes a reality that guarantees the bearer an existence, however hard to define, that endures beyond death.”<sup>12</sup> The name holds the entire existence of the being within it, which is central to the ordering of society. Each god, law, role, and object that is essential to the order and balance of society is named by a higher deity, usually the creator god, and that object is bound to the nature of its name. As long as the name of the being is intact and safe, order and balance are safe, but if the name is stolen or removed, such as YHWH’s or Marduk’s, reality is altered and chaos results.

The power of the name is so crucial that Ancient Near Eastern parents normally gave children names with a positive meaning, and many times the name contained theophoric elements in hopes that the god or goddess would bless that child. When dealing with theophoric names in the Hebrew Bible, Jeaneane Fowler states, “Throughout these names the idea of God's protection seems to be evident: he is a 'door', a 'mountain or sanctuary', he is a 'refuge', 'comforter' and 'help' whose 'trust' and 'strength' can be relied upon. The idea contained in the concept of protection, is one of preservation and patronage or guardianship by the divine subject of the name.”<sup>13</sup> Theophoric naming allows a blessing from the appropriate god or goddess to be permanently affixed to the name bearer.

Names are a source of power in this hierarchy. If someone has a name that means something powerful, then the person is bound to that power. The name Sammael, for

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<sup>12</sup> F. V. Reiterer, “*Šem*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Helmer Ringren G. Johannes Botterweck, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 134.

<sup>13</sup> Jeaneane D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew: A Comparative Study*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 49 (Sheffield: 1988), 75.

example, means poison of God and in Judeo-Christian, angelic folklore, Samael is the angel who descends from heaven and defies God by lying with Lillith and creating demons and evil spirits. The name allows Samael the ability to defy his creator and spawn poisonous offspring. If a human or a person with lesser power obtained Samael's name, this name can be used as a weapon or a source of power. The lesser power can use the name to make the name bearer give him/her power or do his/her bidding, and thus many names are kept secret. John Wilson states, "To the ancient, the name was an element of personality and of power. It might be so charged with divine potency that it could not be pronounced. Or the god might retain a name hidden for himself alone, maintaining this element of power over all gods and men."<sup>14</sup> The need to keep the name secret is meant to protect the order and balance of power as well as to keep humans and deities safe. Trachtenburg states:

The members of many primitive tribes have two names, one for public use, the other jealously concealed, known only to the man who bears it. Even the immediate members of the family never learn what it is; if an enemy should discover it, its bearer's life is forfeit. In highest antiquity peoples, the occult power that inheres in the name is recognized, and the name itself is known to be a mighty and awesome force in the hands of the magician... The more such names a magician has garnered, the greater the number of spirits that are subject to his call and command.<sup>15</sup>

Frequently, names were conveyed in ways to deter evil spirits from killing the child or taking its soul. Often times, such as with the *brit milah*, naming will be postponed or the child will receive a false "double" name until the culture feels it is safe to give the real name. Fowler states, "Akkadian names, however, often tend to express more explicitly the psychological situation surrounding the name-giving, such as Enlil is father of the

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<sup>14</sup> John A. Wilson, "The God and His Unkown Name of Power," in *Ancient near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Meridian, 1961), 79-80.

weak.”<sup>16</sup> If the demon hears the name that represents a child who is lame or un-healthy, the demon will probably not strike the child with an ailment or kill it, for it is already ill. Another way to deter the death of children is to name the child after a dead relative. The spirit or demon will see that the name bearer is already dead and will leave the child alone.

The secret name holds importance not only to protect the life and fate of the name-bearer but also to keep the system in balance to prevent chaos. This work examines the common, folkloristic theme of secret names as it exists in the system of balance in the Ancient Near East through four different texts: The Legend of Isis and Ra, Jacob and the Angel in Genesis, Marduk in the *Enuma Elish*, and YHWH in Exodus. These texts show how secrecy is the fulcrum on which the entire system is balanced, and secret names and secret knowledge keep the concept of naming and the hierarchy of power in equilibrium.

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<sup>16</sup> Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names*, 238.

## CHAPTER II

### THE POWER OF THE SECRET NAME OF RA

Nowhere is the concept of secret names displayed as blatantly than in Ancient Egypt. A heavily developed mythology on names evolved and morphed with the different ruling dynasties. Egypt practiced a form of syncretism in which the diverse theologies blend to create a new religion. The syncretism allowed the gods to take on new characteristics while still maintaining their fundamental nature. For instance, the sun God Ra is frequently assimilated with new gods or the gods of the current ruler. When the cult of Amun takes rise in the Middle Kingdom, Ra becomes Amun-Ra. The syncretism gives Ra a new characteristic of being the "Hidden One," who existed even before the creation of the world, thus allowing the Middle Kingdom pharaoh to claim that his gods were primordial. Given the long history and large amount of writings, the mythology and development of Ra and other Egyptian gods are fundamental concepts that persist throughout the history of Ancient Egypt's writings, because the nature of the gods were essential to the life and afterlife of every Egyptian. The concept of secret names is one of these fundamental characteristics that can be located throughout the stories of Ancient Egypt, especially when dealing with the story of Isis and Ra.

To examine the concept of secret names in Ancient Egypt, several contributing factors need to be examined. First, the characteristics of Ra must be investigated, because Ra is a central figure in the power structure of the Egyptian pantheon and plays a key role in a large amount of the stories of the gods. Considering the development of

Ra's characteristics, the scope of the stories and how the concept of secrecy and names remained central to Ra's character are important in the development of the mythology, thus need to be examined. Second, how the structure of order and power existed in Ancient Egypt and how secret names are a large factor in that power structure are important in every legend or story in ancient Egypt. Finally, Ra's secret name is analyzed, and how it is relinquished to Isis, and what the encounter means according to the power structure of Egyptian mythology.

### **The Characteristics of Ra**

Ra was a central figure in the Heliopolitan theology of Ancient Egypt that featured nine gods, the Ennead, with Atum as the central creator. At the creation of the world, Atum manifests himself as Ra, the sun, in order to give life to the earth. This myth structure is used as the basis work for many of the other myths and theologies that were formed through the process of syncretism.<sup>17</sup> The self generation of Ra is an important aspect of the Egyptian religion specifically for the creation of life, human and divine, and the creation of order, or Ma'at. Ra assumed supremacy above all the gods when he created himself and all others.

In the Hermopolitan theology, there are eight gods, Ogdoad, before creation that aid in the actual generation of Atum-Ra. One such god is Amun, who is generally regarded as the "hidden one." During the New Kingdom in Thebes, Amun unifies with Ra and becomes the national god. He is no longer just the creator but also the hidden one before creation. Van Dijk states, "Amun began development when nothing existed, yet

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<sup>17</sup> Jacobus Van Dijk, "Myth and Mythmaking Ancient Egypt," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), 1699.



the world was not empty of him in the beginning; he is the hidden, incomprehensible cause of creation" further adding to the power and mystic of Ra.<sup>18</sup> Not only is Ra the creation of all life, his supremacy allows him to be the one being that was in existence before all creation.

Ra had several manifestations on Earth. There were 75 names for Ra found in the tomb of Thutmosis III.<sup>19</sup> Each name recalled another aspect of his being, and charted how he interacted with the Earth and humanity. Quirke explains, "These different terms are sometimes combined, for example in the divine name Ra-Atum the two aspects of divine creation are to be invoked at the same time...Accordingly, one of the names of the sun god was Khepri 'the one who comes into being', and a epithet for a creator god is *kheper-djese*f he who comes into being of himself, the self created."<sup>20</sup> Ra was also said to have multiple *kas*, or spirits. Ringgren states that the "*kas* of Ra are different emanations of the god given to humans."<sup>21</sup> Each of these emanations and names was a testament to the many forms of Ra, and to the power which he exerted upon the world to control all existence.

An important manifestation of Ra is that of the *benu*. The *benu* was the Egyptian bird of resurrection. Many have compared this bird to a phoenix. The bird was a power emitted from Ra, the sun that led the deceased into the realm of the underworld. The Book of the Dead chapter 29B states:

I am the benu, *ba*-soul of Ra,  
He who leads the blessed to the Underworld,

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<sup>18</sup> Van Dijk, "Myth and Mythmaking in Ancient Egypt," 1702.

<sup>19</sup> H.B. Huffmon, "Name," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Bob Becking Karl van der Toorn, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 610.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Quirke, *The Cult of Ra* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Lund, 1947), 43-44.

He who has Osiris return to earth,  
To do what his *ka*-spirit desires,  
Who has [name of deceased] return to earth,  
To do what his *ka*-spirit desires.<sup>22</sup>

Without the role Ra plays as the *benu*, the spirits of those deceased would not have the ability to travel to the underworld and become reborn. Ra thus had control over the life and death of all creation and without the power of the *benu*, the entire system of existence would be in chaos with spirits wandering the world and the dead never resting. The fact that the afterlife and burial in Egypt was the most important concept in Ancient Egypt, Ra's supremacy over this system through the *benu* was a crucial manifestation of his power.<sup>23</sup>

Ra also has an important role as the ruler of the Ennead. Being the creator of the gods, he is also their ruler by default. The coffin text of Sebekaa states this idea:

The spoken came to be: Mine is All [Atum] in my existence, alone  
I am Ra in his first risings, I am the great god who came into being of himself,  
He who created is names, lord of the Nine Gods [i.e. of all gods],  
He who has no opponent among the gods,  
Mine is yesterday and I know tomorrow.<sup>24</sup>

Ra is the arbitrator of the struggle between Horus and Seth upon his throne. He alone decides who will gain the inheritance and which territory Horus or Seth will establish rule.<sup>25</sup> As powerful judge of the Ennead, he defines those roles of each of the gods as ruler of Upper or Lower Egypt. Ra has the ability to bestow these different roles and

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<sup>22</sup> Quirke, *The Cult of Ra*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> The tale of Sinuhe gives a perfect example of this need for an Egyptian to have a proper burial in Egypt. As he travels abroad, he realizes that it is possible that he may die and be buried in a foreign land. Thus he leaves the new life that he created for himself, his children, and his land, to return to Egypt for a proper burial. A good translation can be found in Miriam Lichtheim, "The Prophecies of Nerferti," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 222-235.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, "The Prophecies of Nerferti," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 214-223.

establish the hierarchy between the two gods.

Ra's most important power arises from his roles as creator and judge of the gods, as well as his power through his many names, secret or not. The concept of order and control resonates from each of these characteristics of Ra. Through his divine power and supremacy, Ra is generally regarded as the presence of life and order for his creation, but this role is made apparent in the physical aspects of the sun. In the harsh climate of the Egyptian world, the sun was both life giver and destroyer, because without the sun, crops would never grow, people would have no warmth, and animals would perish; but the sun could also be harsh and burn away life. The sun also governed the time of the day, because it rose, shifted, and set with each given day, traveling mystically through the sky in its "barque". When the sun set each day, Ra entered the Underworld to take his place as Osiris, king of the realm of the dead. The display of power existed for every waking eye to see.

### **Order and Chaos in Ancient Egypt**

Like most of the Ancient Near Eastern civilizations, Ancient Egypt believed in an order that is in constant contention with chaos, supreme disorder. The god Ra and his travel across the sky are central to the ordering and stability of society. Every day, as Ra travels across the sky in his barque, the Apophis snake attempts to consume him, possibly invoking an eclipse. The snake is the symbol of all disorder and if the serpent was successful the world would be consumed by darkness and chaos, but Seth wards off the snake everyday for Ra. When the sun sets and Ra becomes Osiris, he will only be reborn the next day as Ra opens his eye and the sun will rise; therefore, it is a symbol of all

humanity for the endless cycle of life, death, and resurrection. The hierarchy of Ra is thus established each day as the epic battle ensues while Ra travels from horizon to horizon.

Like other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, the hierarchy of power is established in Ancient Egypt through the supreme creator god or goddess giving laws or order to humans through a king. The king is the god's or goddess's representative on earth. The god Ra assigns to the king order that only he is strong enough to use, and then the king disperses the order to the people who do not hold enough power to control the society. A text first found in the temple of Hatshepsut, but is located in many temples and tombs after Hatshepsut's reign, clearly states the role of the king as the mediator between the sun god and humanity.

The sun god and creator, Re, has placed the king on earth  
for ever and ever,  
in order that he may  
judge mankind and satisfy the gods,  
establish Ma'at and annihilate Isfet;  
giving offerings to the gods and funerary offerings to the dead.<sup>26</sup>

To keep order through the hierarchy of power, Ra conveys instruction secret knowledge that only the king can interpret. The king has enough power, control, and intelligence to understand and wield the secret knowledge. The Evening Accompaniments to the Sun Worship of the King exemplifies this:

The king knows this secret speech, which the Easterners say  
When they chant the song for Ra at his rising at his appearance on the horizon.  
When they open for him the double door in the gateway of the Eastern horizon.  
And he sails on the paths of the sky.  
He knows their initiations and their forms,  
Their settlements which are in the God's Land  
He knows the place of their position there, at receiving Ra upon the way.

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<sup>26</sup> Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 11.

He knows the speech, spoken by the crew, as they drag forward the Barque of the Horizon.

He knows the birth of Ra and his forms that are in the Floodwater.

He knows this secret gate by which the great god emerges

He knows those who are in the Morning Barque, and the great Image who is in the Evening Barque.

He knows your mooring posts in the horizon, and your steered paths in the sky.<sup>27</sup>

The fear of a chaotic time without order, allows for the king, a figure of high power, to be given secret knowledge to protect humanity through various laws and edicts; therefore, the king, as the mediator, guides the society in order to prevent a chaotic future.

As Ra creates the many different deities and their roles, he needed a deity to rule over society through his power and supremacy. In this fashion, he created Ma'at to be the ruler of order that was needed for society. Ma'at is the daughter of Ra and represents order. Van Dijk states, "Ma'at represents the perfect, stable order of existence that governs every aspect of the world as we know it, from the laws of nature to the rules of human social life."<sup>28</sup> Ma'at distinctly ordered life and social institutions. Through an excerpt from the Prophecy of Nerferti (Nefer-rohu), a chaotic time is depicted when Ra is enveloped in darkness:

I show you the land in turmoil;  
The weak-armed is strong-armed,  
One salutes him who saluted.  
I show you the undermost uppermost,  
What was turned on the back turns the belly.  
Men will live in the graveyard,  
The beggar will gain riches,  
The great [will rob] to live  
The poor will eat bread,  
The slaves will be exalted.<sup>29</sup>

The author intends to show a world where the order of society is turned upside down, but

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<sup>27</sup> Quirke, *The Cult of Ra*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> Van Dijk, "Myth and Mythmaking in Ancient Egypt," 1700.

<sup>29</sup> Lichtheim, "The Prophecy of Nerfeti," 143.

also to declare that a savior, the next king Amenemhet I, is looming. The society, as depicted, is rife with polar opposites: rich versus poor and strong versus weak. Ma'at was set to keep these opposites separate in order to keep chaos at bay.

### **Names of Power in the Hierarchy of Power**

Names are also important in the hierarchy of order and power of humanity and the divine. Like the 75 names of Ra, every name describes a part of that person or deity's very being and was in essence the person himself/herself. A Pharaoh owned five names, each of which symbolizing a manifestation of his power. For gods, the name meant everything. Jan Assmann states, “‘Name’ refers not only to proper names such as Osiris and Amun but denotes everything that may be said and told about a deity in epithets, titles, pedigrees, genealogies, myths-in short, its entire linguistic representation.”<sup>30</sup> The entire linguistic representation of a being holds immense power. Every level of power and control that the god could exert or has exerted was contained in the single word that existed as the name.

How are names used in power? The name was a vulnerable part of humans and even the gods. Like all Ancient Near Eastern civilizations, Ancient Egypt believed the name could be used to invoke the power of the figure that held it; therefore, a human could control a god by using the god's true name. Likewise, a human's true name held the essence of that person; therefore, if someone obtained a person's true name, that someone could enact influence on the person whose name is under possession. Not only is it a threat for a person to obtain the power of a person or a god, it is also a threat to Ma'at herself. According to Ancient Egyptian thought, the order of society would be

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<sup>30</sup> Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, 10.

disturbed if a being of lesser power obtains the power of a god or someone of a higher status, because this conflicts with the ordering of society by Ma'at. The secret knowledge through these names also conflicts with the secret knowledge that is given by Ra to the king. The hierarchy will be threatened two fold, and an event of these proportions could invite chaos and destruction into the Ancient Egyptian world.

The name holds the entire of essence of a human's soul; therefore, the secret knowledge of a human's name is potentially disastrous. Through the power of names, not only would order be threatened but one's afterlife would be in danger. For humanity, the most important characteristic of Egyptian religion to protect is one's own afterlife, thus it is essential to protect one's name. If a person loses his/her name, then that person will not be identified by the appropriate gods in the afterlife; therefore, the person is lost forever in between life and afterlife. Without the name, the afterlife is an impossibility. Ritner seems to agree with this idea by stating, "Felt to be an intrinsic element and source of power, the name did not simply identify but defined an individual. For hostile purposes, the destruction of a name could affect the death or misfortune of its owner, and this belief underlies both the prominent role of naming in execration texts and the well attested expunging of royal names in dynastic feuds."<sup>31</sup> The practice of destroying the names of enemies allowed harm to come to the person in life and the afterlife. For debatable reasons, Thutmosis III removed Hathshepsut's name from statues and stelas as if to remove her entire being. Removing the name causes the person to be removed entirely.

For humans, it was up to that person to keep his/her name safe and his/her family

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Kriech Ritner, "The Legend of Isis and the Name of Re," in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo (New York: Brill, 1993), 33.

would protect it during the afterlife. Frazer believed, "Every Egyptian received two names, which were known respectively as the true name and the good name, or the great name and the little name; and while the good or little name was made public, the true or great name appears to have been carefully concealed."<sup>32</sup> If the family of a person revealed his/her name to the public or to enemies, it would be potentially dangerous. Families would also pay priests to keep ancestors tombs in proper conditions, because this further helps the person's future in the afterlife. Considering the spells and incantations that would involve that person's name in the tomb, the upkeep of the tomb would also ensure that the human's name would never be disturbed and the person would exist in the afterlife forever.

The mythology found in various texts shows the existence of secret names for the gods. In an encounter between Seth and Horus, Horus tries to pry Seth's secret name from him. Seth attempts to give false names until he eventually discloses the true name: "it is the evil day on which nothing can be conceived or born."<sup>33</sup> The name is appropriate for Seth considering that he is depicted as a god of death, chaos, and confusion. The secret name reveals the very being of the god Seth and Horus intended to use it to hold dominion over him. Amun, who later becomes fused with Ra, is said to have a powerful secret name. Assmann assesses the text in stating, "Even the name of "Amun," the "Hidden One," is just an epithet masking the true and hidden name of this god, of whom another hymn states:

People fall down immediately for fear  
if his name is uttered knowingly or unknowingly

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<sup>32</sup> Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Abridged ed. (London: Oxford, 1994), 199.

<sup>33</sup> Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994), 29-31.



There is no god able to call him by it.<sup>34</sup>

The text shows that the secret name of Amun is a source of power, and considering that Amun was present before creation, he is more powerful than the other gods and they are incapable of uttering his very name.

### **Ra's Secret Name**

Ra's secret name is equally as powerful as Amun's and more so than any other god. Being the creator god, Ra's name holds magical power. In one papyrus, Ra, as Atum-Ra, states, "Magic is my name."<sup>35</sup> When Amun becomes Amun-Ra, it amplifies the different hidden characteristics of Ra, who is already a keeper of his secret name and secret knowledge of order. A hymn to Amun implicitly describes the secret name of Amun-Ra:

All gods are three:  
Amun, Re, and Ptah, whom none equals.  
He who hides his name as Amun  
He appears to the face as Re,  
His body is Ptah.<sup>36</sup>

He is now regarded as the "hidden Ba", an omnipresent being located in every aspect of creation. Assmann refers to a hymn to Amun-Ra that describes the hidden Ba that states: He is Ba-like, hidden of name like his secrecy.<sup>37</sup> Being lord of all creation, king of the Ennead, and father to Ma'at, Ra finds it essential to protect his name from anyone, for chaos and darkness could ensue if someone were to destroy him through knowledge of

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<sup>34</sup> Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization No. 54 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 26.

<sup>36</sup> Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, 64.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

his secret name.

In one text, Ra is not so careful with his secret name. The Turin Papyrus, which is dated to the 13th century BCE and the 19th dynasty of Egypt, tells of Ra and Isis, who is seen as the goddess of magic and the wife of Osiris. Isis is seeking power in the Ennead, and knows that if she contains the power of Ra, she will be a force to reckon with. The interaction shows the explicit nature of secret names.

The text begins by showing the vulnerability of the god Ra. Through different texts describing the characteristics of Ra, it is hard to believe that he would relinquish his name so freely, but this text well establishes his weakness and old age. It even limits Ra's life to periods of one hundred and twenty years. When Ra was in his throne during the day, he begins to drool and it drips on the Earth. The dribbling is a sign that he is old and vulnerable to attack. The text explains this to show that the all powerful god is possibly vulnerable, when most would think otherwise. Only through this vulnerability would Ra be willing to relinquish something so sacred.

The frequency in which the importance of the hidden name as mentioned in this texts gives light to the power it held. The text even states, "My father thought out my name...My father and mother told me my name. I have hidden it in my body from my children so as to prevent the power of a male or female magician from coming into existence against me."<sup>38</sup> Clearly, Ra is the only one alive that knows his own true name and true being. Ra does not want his unknowable name to be used against him, because the implications would be disastrous. In this passage, Ra explains that he has hidden it from other gods and to wield it as power could be harmful to him and all creation.

According to the text, Isis wants to gain power from the old and vulnerable Ra.

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<sup>38</sup> Ritner, "The Legend of Isis and the Name of Re," 33.

Ritner's translation of Isis' intentions states, "There was nothing that she did not know in heaven or earth, like Re, who made the substance of the earth. The goddess planned in her heart to learn the name of the noble god."<sup>39</sup> She also knew that even with Ra in his vulnerable state of old age; she would never gain the power of Ra without his secret name. She knew how to wield the power of his name because of her ability to use words of power and magic. As a goddess of magic, the essence of words and names were hers to control, and any mere word could be used as a source of power. Budge states that her words of power "were a priceless possession, for she obtained them from Thoth, who was the personification of the mind and intelligence of the Creator."<sup>40</sup> Considering that Ra was the creator, he also was a god of magic with his ability to create from nothing. Isis contained, in essence, a level of this power. Isis knew that she could receive knowledge of her full amount of power through his secret name, a word that contained the every being of the creation and order itself.

Being a goddess of magic and creation, Isis contained power similar to Ra, which helped her in tricking Ra. When his spittle hit the ground, she used it and some earth to create a serpent to lay in wait to strike and poison Ra. It was important for her to use the spittle of Ra for it was this same spittle that created the earth in one of the creation myths.<sup>41</sup> When the serpent indeed strikes Ra, he is unable to call forth the poison out of his body because the serpent was not created by Ra. If the serpent had indeed been

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Wallis E.A. Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (New York: Dover, 1971), 142.

<sup>41</sup> For more on spitting in creation or how it can be used as a weapon see Robert K. Ritner. *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 75. The chapter, "Spitting, Licking and Swallowing, deals also with other bodily fluids and how they were used in magical myths and practices.

created by Ra, he would have had no trouble in calling forth the fluid from his body.<sup>42</sup>

The serpent was created by Isis with her words of power, and thus, Ra was powerless in controlling the snake and its poison.

The serpent causes Ra to leave from his path and the sun is taken from the sky, an eclipse. Darkness now envelopes the land and Ra is in trouble. In his painful state, Ra summons all the practitioners of magic and powerful words, among the gods, to cure him of his ailment. Isis was among these practitioners, and promised Ra that she had the cure for his pain. Isis's price for the cure was that she wanted his secret name in return. With the world plunged in darkness and Ma'at given to chaos, Ra had no other option but to relinquish this name. As soon as he does, he is reinstated in the sky and feels the pain of the sting no more. Ra's name was sacrificed to Isis so that order would continue even if he will forever live in fear that Isis could one day control his power.

The text ends with Isis stating, "Re lives; the poison is dead...the poison is dead through the speech of Isis the Great, the Mistress of the Gods, who knows Re by his own name."<sup>43</sup> However, the text gives no allusion to the repercussions in store for Ra and Ma'at. Budge states, "In yielding up his name to the goddess he placed himself in her power, and in this example we have a striking instance of the belief that the knowledge of the name of god, or devil, or human being, implied dominion over that being."<sup>44</sup> The text might be a myth created by a practitioner of the cult of Isis attempting to explain how Isis gained her status among the gods, or proclaiming that she was mightier than even Ra. The issue is that power and order have been compromised by Isis, but apparently she

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<sup>42</sup> For more examples of the power to call forth Ra's creation see *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* in which Ra is able to call forth the semen of Horus and Seth to discover who impregnated whom. Ra has the ability to do this since he created both of these gods and all their fluids.

<sup>43</sup> Ritner, "The Legend of Isis and the Name of Re," 34.

<sup>44</sup> Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, 161-162.

understands the severity of keeping Ma'at as she reestablishes Ra into the sky to banish the darkness of chaos. However, through the knowledge of his secret name, she was able to gain the power over the greatest of the gods, Ra; the creator and judge of all, humans and gods alike.

The blatant description of the hidden name of Ra in the story of Isis and Ra, gives an example of the folkloristic qualities of secret names that can be found throughout Egyptian literature and myth, and can be extended to literature and myth throughout the Ancient Near East. The Ancient Near East's balance of chaos and order as exemplified in the hierarchy of power is well attested to in different legends throughout the area. The secret name of Ra, and other deified entities, is a precious object that could overthrow order if it is used by beings of lesser power. The entire linguistic representation of a being is contained in the secret name. Through knowledge of that name, one could control the being, or gain immense power. This is exactly what Isis did as she created a trap for the creator of the gods. Even though there are no further texts about the two deities, she gained the ability to influence and control Ra, and thus, had power over all of Ra's manifestations and names, power over creation, and power over order.

## CHAPTER III

### JACOB'S STRUGGLE: THE CONCEPT OF SECRET NAMES IN GENESIS

Like the mythology and stories of Ancient Egypt, the texts from the Ancient Near East, such as the Hebrew Bible, contain many common folkloristic concepts. Although many of these texts vary in composition, authorship, and editing, certain characteristics remain throughout. The Hebrew Bible contains common ideas such as divine order from chaos, hierarchy of power, and naming. In particular, the ideas of secrecy and secret names exemplify the folkloristic nature of the Hebrew Bible.

The Book of Genesis contains a broad sampling of the Hebrew Bible's folklore, making it the best starting point of an investigation into the character of secret names. Genesis explains the origins of humanity and the Hebrew peoples by recounting fundamental legends and how Israel entered Egypt. In Genesis, different characters, word play, and plot structures illustrate the folkloristic qualities that are contained in the text.<sup>45</sup> The use of naming and name changes are essential factors in these narratives because they show how the power of naming establishes the hierarchy of power and keeps chaos from entering Hebrew society.

In the beginning of Genesis 2, YHWH gives Adam the ability to name the beasts of the Earth; hence the animals are to serve Adam while in Eden. Adam's power to name the animals, which YHWH grants him, is the power to determine the fate of the animal. The name given by someone of higher power binds the animal to the meaning of its

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<sup>45</sup> For further examination on how different motifs, themes, and words reveal different meanings within the narratives of Genesis, as well as other narratives of the Hebrew Bible, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (U.S.: Basic Books, 1981) esp. 88-113.

name, and the animal can only break from the fate of its name if the name is changed by another person/deity of higher power. Through giving and knowing the animal's name, Adam can control that being because the name is connected with the animal's soul; Adam can command the animal to do whatever he wants through invoking its essence.

Likewise, in the patriarchal stories, Abraham's name change is a symbol that he belongs to the god, YHWH, who named him. Sarah's name change from Sarai is an extension of this transformation emphasizing her covenant with YHWH to become the first matriarch.

The story of Jacob also illustrates of the power exerted by names and naming and embodies all the concepts of naming that are essential in Genesis. Jacob's name, like Abraham's and Sarah's, changes as a sign of power, but his narrative involves an encounter similar to Isis and Ra. Jacob, like Isis, finds himself in a struggle with a divine being of greater power. As Isis attempts to gain power from Ra by tricking the god, Jacob, lesser in power and abilities than Isis, also attempts to gain power from his wrestling opponent. In the end, Jacob realizes that if he is able to gain the being's name, he will have control over him. Jacob receives a blessing from the being, as he desired, but he is unable to control the opponent through its secret name.

An examination of Jacob's battle with the mysterious figure in Genesis 32 reveals the nature of the secret name. Three major questions help define this nature. First, who is this mysterious figure that wrestles with Jacob? The text itself declares that it is merely a man, but Jacob is not convinced that the mysterious figure is human. Second, how does the blessing of a new name for Jacob reveal the folkloristic power structure? The name change not only shows a shift in the power structure, but also a change in story. Finally, what does the narrated dialogue tell us about the nature of names in the Hebrew Bible?

The answers to these questions reveal that the concept of secret names is prevalent in the Hebrew Bible and is completely embodied in the narrative of Jacob.

### **Man or Angel: The Identity of the Mysterious Figure**

Scholars struggle with the identity of the mysterious wrestling figure because the text is ambiguous about the true nature of the stranger. The context of the wrestling match is Jacob's life after his years of servitude to gain his wives under Laban. Jacob travels with his family and plans to make amends with his brother Esau with a peace offering. After entering a "camp" of angels, he decides to settle for the night near the ford of Jabbok, and here is where Jacob hears that Esau is *en route* to meet him with a large troop of men. Fearful that Esau is preparing for battle, Jacob sends servants to meet Esau with gifts in order to dampen his brother's rage because Jacob was unprepared to do battle. Alone after sending his family to cross the river, Jacob meets a stranger at sunset, and they wrestle all night. Jacob's hip becomes dislocated in the fight, and the stranger desperately attempts to flee; however, Jacob will not release his grip until he is blessed. The stranger grants Jacob's requirement, giving him the new name of Israel, and the stranger flees quickly. Convinced that he wrestled a god, Jacob, now Israel, renames the area פניאל, Peniel, or face of god, and then departs to meet his brother.

Genesis specifically states that this figure is an אִישׁ, or a man, a word that the redactor uses to call into question the divine status of the mysterious stranger and to create ambiguity in the text. Many scholars assume that the stranger is a human figure.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For different interpretations regarding Esau as the mystery assailant, see Jerome Kodell, "Jacob Wrestles with Esau, Gen. 32, 23-32," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (1980). and S. Molen, "The Identity of Jacob's Assailant: Wrestling with Ambiguity in Gen 32:23-32," *Shofar* 11, no. 2 (1993).



For instance, because Esau is already marching against Jacob, some biblical critics believe that the scuffle is between the two brothers. While this hypothesis seems reasonable, it does not take into consideration the remainder of the narrative, which gives evidence that the figure could not actually be Esau. During Jacob's wrestling match, Esau is still far away meeting with Jacob's servants and could not have been physically present. Additionally, when Esau accepts Jacob's apology at a later meeting, neither the narrator nor the brothers allude to the wrestling match. The stories are possibly two different fragments of text that the redactor placed adjacent to one another with one fragment describing Esau wrestling Jacob and the other describing Jacob meeting Esau; however, a separate story in which Esau and Jacob wrestle is unlikely because Esau does not have the power to rename Jacob. The power to rename someone comes from a higher power, and giving Esau that power would make him more powerful than Jacob. If Esau represents the ancestor of Edom and Jacob represents Israel, the redactor would not present Esau as a higher power able to bless and rename Jacob. The mysterious man described could not physically be Esau.

Religious interpreters have traditionally understood the mysterious stranger as an angel, regardless of the text stating that the figure is a man. One possible reason for this belief has to do with the camp that Jacob enters only a few verses earlier in the text. Jacob sees angels in the camp and names the place מַחֲנַיִם, or Mahanaim. Some scholars who agree with non scholarly interpretations of the passage have argued that this brief story was added by the J redactor in order to allude to the stranger's identity as an angel. For example, Tzemah Yoreh states,

According to 32, 24-30 Jacob wrestles with a mystery 'man' – the identity of this 'man' is in doubt, there are those who argue even today that this 'man' was none

other than Esau – Jacob’s brother (and not an angel). This ambiguity disappears though, once we add on 32,2-3a. If immediately before the struggle, Jacob encounters a company of angels, it must be assumed that this ‘man’ is one of the company.<sup>47</sup>

Yoreh assumes that the narrative existed originally as one piece and that the Yahwist separated the text to create the ambiguity of the identity of the mysterious figure.<sup>48</sup> He believes that the redactor wants to keep the figure as a mystical manifestation of god. However, the text offers an identity for the mysterious figure instead of being ambiguous in the way that Yoreh proposes.

The figure’s identity turns not on what Kodell and Mole or Yoreh think; instead the redactor intends the stranger to be understood the way Jacob sees him, and Jacob thinks that the figure is a heavenly being. Not only does Jacob think his figure is divine; he assumes that his opponent is Elohim, or an angelic representation of god. Jacob confirms his belief by renaming the place Peniel, פניאל, and proclaims that he has seen Elohim’s face. Jacob survives this face-to-face encounter with Elohim only through the representation of an angel standing in the place of Elohim on earth. This narrative detail emphasizes that the figure is an angel, despite a possible separation of the text by the redactor. Jacob first walks through the angelic camp and then names his battle ground Peniel to proclaim that his opponent was indeed divine. The redactor leads the reader to identify with Jacob and to concur with Jacob that the figure was an angelic one. But is the figure, in fact, angelic?

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<sup>47</sup> Tzemah Yoreh, "Jacob's Struggle," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117, no. 1 (2005), 96.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 97.

## **Jacob and the Jinn?**

Another hypothesis of interest exists in relation to this mysterious figure, and it is more folkloristic than angels or gods. In light of the superstition and folk beliefs of the time, Jacob's wrestling opponent may well be a type of nature spirit that dwells near the ford of Jabbok. The figure is more like a jinn of Arabic culture than an Hebraic angel because of the area he arises from and qualities attributed to him. The agricultural society of Ancient Israel was superstitious when dealing with nature and natural phenomena. Jinn and other folkloristic, supernatural beings were often attached to geographical areas in order to explain these natural phenomena. Although there is no proof that Ancient Israelites believed in jinn, the people created figures such as Lilith, the lilitum, and other spirits and demons to explain the unexplainable. Sir James Frazer agrees with this hypothesis and describes the figure as one of the jinn. He states, "I shall adduce, we may, perhaps, provisionally suppose that Jacob's mysterious adversary was the spirit or jinnee of the river, and that the struggle was purposely sought by Jacob for the sake of obtaining his blessing."<sup>49</sup> Frazer firmly believes that Jacob is intent on trapping the spirit in a way to obtain more power, possibly to thwart his brother. In stories about jinn, people attempt to trap the spirits in an attempt to steal power or blessing from them just as Jacob takes a blessing from the figure at Jabbok.

If the whole battle is between Jacob and the jinni, the story does resemble a tale that Scheherazade weaves in the *1001 Nights*. Jacob meets the figure at Jabbok at a ford, which is an area with an unexplainable natural shallow "bridge" that allows for crossing.

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<sup>49</sup> Sir James George Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, Abridged ed. (New York: Tudor, 1923), 252.

Most likely, this mysterious bridge has a folkloristic spirit attached to it; hence, the stranger is that spirit. In Genesis, the figure seems to materialize before Jacob's eyes out of nowhere near the ford. Without word, and as if expected, he wrestles with Jacob.

In addition to the materialization of the figure, the parameters of the wrestling match are striking. The figure, who only appears when Jacob is alone, seems to be afraid of dawn because he is frantic to get free from Jacob's grasp at the sun's rising. The stranger is only willing to submit to Jacob in order to escape the breaking dawn. The breaking of dawn is not something a man or an angel would fear, but this lesser spirit is limited in powers and bound by nature in his fear of the sun; therefore, the nature figure apparently can only exist in the world under certain limitations. Jacob notices and exploits these limits in order to gain power. Jacob would not release the sun-fearing being until receiving a blessing, which the spirit obliges while fleeing quickly. The trapping of a spirit in order to gain a supernatural blessing is common to Ancient Near Eastern folkloristic stories, and the stranger's spirit-like characteristics indicate that the stranger straddles an identity between man and angel. The figure is a powerful nature spirit who has the ability to bless Jacob with a new name.

Regardless of the stranger's actual identity, a nature spirit, more powerful than a human, has the power to bless. However, like the Isis and Ra story, a being of lesser status is able to wrestle the power from the greater being. In the case of Ra, Isis exploits the god's vulnerability, which is indicated by his advanced age and tendency to drool. An angel or god in the Hebrew text would neither be vulnerable nor subject to fear from the breaking of the day. Like the angels at Sodom and Gomorrah and YHWH in Exodus, there is no vulnerability exhibited as the deities perform destructive actions. To remedy

this Genesis offers a lesser deity who is subject to vulnerability and tricked into blessing a lowly human. If the redactor placed the two fragments together to give ambiguity to the text, then the redactor places one before the wrestling match and one after to shade the folkloristic nature of a being that does not fall into the monotheistic pantheon of a supreme God and messenger angels. The redactor sees the nature spirit for what it is but wants the reader to see the figure as an angel and places the two texts to confuse the reader into agreeing with Jacob. Regardless, the stranger, with his power, places upon Jacob a blessing and new name, forever changing Jacob and his story as well as the story of Israel itself.

### **Israel and the Power of the Name Change**

With its balance of power that keeps chaos at bay, the Hebrew Bible portrays a world much like any other in the Ancient Near East. Elohim shapes the world when only chaos exists and uses naming to bring order from the chaos. In the beginning of Genesis only Elohim and the waters of the abyss exist. Like other Ancient Near Eastern stories, the waters are the element of chaos in the world that Elohim must use to bring order. Elohim gives darkness the name night and light the name day; therefore, the characteristics of darkness and light are bound by their respective names, night and day (לילה and יום). By binding the object to a name, it will forever perform the task that the name delineates and the object becomes a part of the hierarchy of order as the higher being directs. Humans perform the same ordering of lesser beings on earth in an imitation of the higher power that named them. Martin Rose states, “The bestowal of

names initiates the human ordering of creation in Gen 2:19.”<sup>50</sup> Adam has the ability to name animals because his place is higher in the hierarchy than the animals of the earth. Now, Adam orders his domain as Elohim orders creation, and both bind the lesser beings to the names given in order to establish a hierarchy of power that prevents chaos. The power of naming and name changing found in Genesis implies two different concepts: narrative characteristics and the folkloristic implications of power.

### **The Name within the Narrative**

When a person is named in the narratives of Genesis, the naming attaches to that person a characteristic found throughout the story. When the original name is changed, a significant shift in the person’s character occurs because the name’s meaning also implies the essence of the person. In the remainder of the narrative, the character will take a different role from his/her original name because the essence of the person equates with the new name. For example, when Abram cuts a covenant with YHWH, he is an exalted father, אַבְרָם. YHWH promises to make Abram a father of nations and renames Abram, אַבְרָהָם; therefore, in the remainder of the narrative, Abraham fulfills his name as the father of Ishmael and Isaac, whose descendants populate a nation.

Jacob’s naming describes the events that unfold during the birth of him and Esau. When Esau, the first born, emerges red and hairy, his parents name him עֵשָׂו, which is a combination of the adjectives red and hairy in Hebrew. During Esau’s birth, Jacob grasps

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<sup>50</sup> Martin Rose, "Names of God in the OT," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doublday, 1992), 1002. He also includes the passage to further explain what he means. Genesis 2:19: so out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field...and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature that was its name.

the heel of his brother; and receives the name יַעֲקֹב, which literally means “he grabs.”

The naming of both Esau and Jacob is a word play on the actual birth of the two, which is common in the narratives of Genesis. The structure of this naming is labeled Form I by Burke Long. He states:

“In a narrative: Form I was structured so as to report a naming, a name, and its reason (making a word play on the name)...In both latter cases, the inference was drawn from an indispensable element in the dramatic movement; that is the name was based on the resolution of a tension present at the beginning of the narrative.”<sup>51</sup>

The word play is a way to give a twist to the story and may also be an allusion to a possible oral nature to the text. When used, Jacob’s name makes an immediate association to his birth and the characteristics associated with his name.

Jacob’s narrative fulfills his name as he continuously grasps for different attributes in different stories. Jeaneane Fowler states, “To the ancient Semitic mind, the name borne by an individual was more than a mere means of identification since each name revealed some aspect concerning the nature of the person who bore the name.”<sup>52</sup>

Jacob, who grabbed Esau’s heel in an attempt to be first, continuously attempts to trick Esau to give up his birthright. First, he convinces Esau to sell his birthright, and then Jacob steals the birthright from Esau by tricking their father, Isaac. Jacob’s name is a constant reminder of the actions he performs; therefore, in terms of the narrative, the name foreshadows the actions to come. Jacob’s struggle with the stranger is one such action that gives allusion to his name and his character. As the story develops, Jacob attempts to grab power from the other being, possibly in order to gain a weapon from his brother. Sir James Frazer believes that Jacob intentionally sent his family along to be left

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<sup>51</sup> Burke O. Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament* (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann, 1968), 87.

<sup>52</sup> Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names*, 17.

alone that he might trap the being.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Jacob receives a new power from the trapped being. When the stranger changes Jacob's name, it also shifts Jacob's narrative character and his being and frees Jacob from being bound by the name.

When Jacob's name changes to **ישראל**, Israel, he is no longer the one who "grabs the heel" but is now the one who "struggles with god." His essence and character have now changed after he prevails over the deified being. The legend is meant to give the Israelites a common ancestor, and Jacob's character in its earliest form was not one that the Israelites wanted to claim because of his trickster nature. Jacob's story of a struggle with Elohim is meant to transform his character and typify what it means to be an Israelite. Jacob's struggles with the stranger represent a nation that has met adversity and has developed out of those hardships. After the struggle, Jacob's character evolves from a mere trickster to a character who meets struggle head on and prevails, hence becoming the ancestor of the Israelites. His new essence allows him to no longer be afraid, and Jacob is willing to meet his worst fear, his brother Esau. The remainder of the narratives gives images of learning and prevailing from struggles with man and Elohim; thus, the man fulfills the power and characteristics of the new name of Israel, granted by a higher power.

### **The Power of the Name Change**

The same idea is implicit with the power involved in naming. When a person is named, the name holds a piece of that person's soul, which is given by a person or being of higher status, i.e. parent, ruler, or god. If a person's name changes, the soul of that

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<sup>53</sup> Sir James Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, 252.



person alters; another being of higher power is the only one capable this significant change. The new name binds the person's soul to the meaning of the new name.

Pedersen states:

The name is the appellation characterizing each individual soul. In so far it may be said that the name is part of the soul, seeing that it is possessed by it like the body, and everything wherein it manifests itself...The most important feature about the name is, however, not its linguistic significance, but the association with which it is charged. It is understood quite literally that the name is the soul...The name of the child unborn is covered with darkness (Eccles. 6,4) for no one knows its soul."<sup>54</sup>

To name a child is to bind that person with a fate wrapped inside a name. Given this responsibility, it is important to make sure a child is named in a positive way. Pedersen further adds, "There is no doubt that it was a common wish to call one's children by good names to which good forces were attached."<sup>55</sup> Jacob's story contains these folkloristic ideas which are associated with his name and his name change.

Jacob's parents named him, and, throughout his stories, he is bound by his name to fulfill his fate. The only thing that changes Jacob's fate and destiny is a renaming by a higher being. Trachtenberg states, "The essential character of things and of men resides in their names. Therefore to know a name is to be privy to the secret of its owner's being, and master of his fate."<sup>56</sup> After the match between Jacob and the stranger, the stranger asks for Jacob's name, because the stranger needs Jacob's essence in order to bless him. He tells Jacob that he will "no longer be called Jacob, but Israel." The divine stranger took Jacob's name and changed it into Israel, which changes the fate and essence of Jacob. The stranger blesses Jacob to become a greater person; therefore, Jacob is ready to become Israel, the ancestor of legend.

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<sup>54</sup> Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 245-252.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>56</sup> Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 79.

## **The Secret Name of the Stranger**

As Jacob wants to win a blessing and gain power from the being, he attempts to gain the stranger's name. The stranger simply refuses to give his name to Jacob, because his name is powerful. It belongs to a higher power and should be kept secret lest it is used as a weapon by Jacob, who already gained a blessing. If Jacob knows the name of the stranger, he could command the stranger to perform tasks for Jacob, which could include protection from his brother. Trachtenberg states, "To know the name of a man is to exercise power over him alone; to know the name of a higher, supernatural being is to dominate the entire province over which that being presides."<sup>57</sup> Trachtenberg knows that the being attempts to protect himself from Jacob, who previously took a blessing from the stranger. Trachtenberg further believes that the stranger wants to keep his name secret, "lest Jacob invoke him in a magical incantation and he be obliged to obey."<sup>58</sup> With Esau marching upon him, Jacob could use the stranger as a weapon to defeat his brother if a battle ensued. Martin Rose concurs when describing the communication between two beings of different power:

This association of the act of naming with creation underlines the fact that the name represents something wholesome and salutary; the knowledge of the name opens up specific human dimensions for communication and for fellowship. The one who knows the name of a god or a human can appeal to them. The knowledge of the name can thereby have effective power. Magic and incantations attempt to use this knowledge through techniques which exploit the influence of the name. Thereby free communication degenerates into a manipulative attempt to dominate.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>59</sup> Martin Rose, "Names of God in the OT," 1002.

The stranger will not give up his power by revealing his secret name. He literally replies, “Why is it that you ask my name?” This is a rhetorical question in which the stranger is replying in such a way to say that his name is sacred and should not have been requested by a lowly human.<sup>60</sup> With this reply, the stranger flees; he protects his power and secret name from Jacob’s possession.<sup>61</sup>

Like the story of Isis and Ra, the narrative of Jacob’s struggle with the stranger in an effort to gain power and control through the secret name shows the folkloristic concepts that can be found throughout the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible. The characteristic of secret names are found in Genesis 32 with the battle and conversation between Jacob and the deity. Like the folklore contained in the mythology of Ancient Egypt, the Hebrew Bible portrays a world of order shaped from chaos; however, the lawlessness was only kept at bay from the ordering of society and through the hierarchy of power. The power of naming allows higher beings to establish this order by binding lesser beings to their fate in the hierarchy of power. The names of the angels, gods, and the stranger were, however, kept at secret in order to maintain the structure of all existence because a lesser power could gain the name and disrupt the order of the universe.

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<sup>60</sup> For Rhetorical question syntax see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 326 18.3g.

<sup>61</sup> The concept of secret name as seen in the story of Jacob and the stranger is thus reaffirmed in Judges 13. As an angel comes to the parents of Samson in order to prepare them for what they must do to keep the child a Nazirite, a similar conversation develops between the angel and Samson’s father, Manoah. Manoah wants to honor the messenger when the child is born, and, therefore, asks the angel his name. The angel responds in the same manner: “Why is it that you ask my name?” The angel also adds that his name is yalip, or wonderful/incomprehensible.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARDUK AND THE LACK OF A SECRET NAME FOR THE GOD OF BABYLON

Like the rest of the Ancient Near East, Babylon also held beliefs of divine order from chaos and the power of names. The mythology and texts attest many of the ideas, such as the belief in the demon Lamashtu, a folkloric demon who brings about many ailments to children including sudden infant death and complications during pregnancy. Portrayed as a demon who suckles infants with poison, Lamashtu's name means the "one who wipes out" names, and destroys family names by killing offspring.<sup>62</sup> When faced with symptoms of ailment in children, parents would recite incantations invoking Anu, Lamashtu's father, in hoping to protect their children and their name from her wrath. The rulers of Babylon held these folkloristic characteristics and transmitted the ideas through their personal writings.

The Babylonian chronicles of the kings establish the hierarchy of power and portray the king as mediator of the gods and giver of order in society. According to Jean-Jacques Glassner the use of the suffix DINGIR at the beginning of royal names "was probably an allusion to certain idealized models for the transmission of power, kings supposedly being descended from gods. This made it easy to delineate, at a stroke, the contours of the hierarchical totality of the social order and signaled a new, written, relationship to the world."<sup>63</sup> The king delegated societal roles to the people through laws

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<sup>62</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005), 974.

<sup>63</sup> Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 39.

and structure; this is a model of the same structure of supreme ruler and laws that the gods themselves abided. The Babylonians thought that without this structure, the world would plunge into chaos. Like the Prophecy of Nerferti of Egypt, the chaos in Erra and Ishum, a Babylonian story about the importance of Marduk's rule, describes poles reversed:

The cripple could surpass the fleet of foot,  
the weakling could overpower the strong.  
They give voice to gross insolence against the governor  
who provides for their holy places,<sup>64</sup>

The text shows how the gods of Babylon establish the hierarchy of power and the power of names in an attempt to sustain order and to keep chaos at bay.

### **Marduk and His Fifty Names**

In Babylon, the god Marduk's name is not a secret name at all; in fact, his name is invoked by his followers every year at the Akitu festival. His name is essential to the hierarchy of power; its very power constantly binding chaos from escaping, reinforcing the binding through fifty manifestations. Marduk's names forever attest to the courageous battle that shook the foundation of the gods, during the time when he defeated chaos, describing the different elements to the Marduk's victory over Tiamat, or chaos. His names need not be a secret, for no one has the power to conquer the will of Marduk; however, an examination of the names of Marduk will better explain the nature of the secret name and the hierarchy of power over chaos in other folklore of the Ancient Near East.

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<sup>64</sup> Foster, *Before the Muses*, 902.

In a world where the name of a deity was the very essence of that divinity and should be kept sacred, Marduk's name is not secret. Several facets of Marduk's epics and his personal characteristics reveal the nature of his fifty names, helping to disclose why his names are not secret. The first questions to ask are how does the story of the *Enuma Elish* explain the establishment of order and describe the power of Marduk, and how does the narrative explain how he obtains this power? The *Enuma Elish* also narrates Marduk's creation of humanity and Babylon as the gods' seat of power. Second, what is the significance of these names and how does Marduk come to acquire them? Like Ra with his 75 names, Marduk is given fifty names at the end of the *Enuma Elish*, and each name illustrates a different characteristic of Marduk's power, each of which is used to defeat and bind chaos in a special way. Finally, why is Marduk's name not a secret? How do his strength and his names hold back the chaos that every Ancient Near Eastern society feared, and how did Marduk's names become so prized by one city that its people invoked and recited each name every year in celebration of his defeat of chaos?

### **The *Enuma Elish* and Marduk**

Scholars often refer to the *Enuma Elish* as the Babylonian "Epic of Creation." W.G. Lambert believes that the *Enuma Elish* is a campaign for divine kingship in Babylon through Marduk's ascension to supreme Lord of the Gods. Lambert believes that the text was written during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I (circa 1125-1103 BCE), who commissioned a text in which Marduk replaces Enlil as the chief god.

Nebuchadnezzar I used the text as a theological justification for his kingship as well as justification for placing Marduk over Enlil.<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Foster states,

The text can be read as a metaphor for the evolution of Mesopotamian political institutions from a reconstructed local assembly of elders to absolute kingship claiming divine sanction on a regional or international scale. The catalyst for this change is portrayed as outside threat calling for a resolute war leader. The leader demanded, as his terms for leadership, absolute obedience, even when the threat of war was removed.<sup>66</sup>

Exemplified in the text, Marduk takes the position of the absolute leader, as Foster suggests, and demands that the other gods follow him. However, the *Enuma Elish* is more than the creation of the world and humankind, and it is more than divine kingship; moreover, the text is about the order of society and the defeat of chaos, which culminates in the power of naming.

The text begins with a universe of chaos. The only power that exist are the sweet waters, Apsu, and the ocean, Tiamat. Water, with its fluid nature, is viewed as chaotic in essence, but Tiamat, the dragon, is the complete embodiment of chaos. Further, the text explains that chaos is a time without names. The *Enuma Elish* reads:

When on high no name was given to heaven,  
Nor below was the netherworld called by name  
When no gods at all had been brought forth,  
Nor called by names, none destinies ordained.<sup>67</sup>

The fact that destinies are associated with giving of names attests to the power and significance of an object's name; therefore, the object's or person's name is his/her soul and fate. The two gods of chaos, Apsu and Tiamat, decide that they will create and bring forth Lahmu and Lahamu by calling the names of the two. Foster states, "The poet

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<sup>65</sup> W.G. Lambert, "Studies in Marduk," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 47 (1984), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>67</sup> Foster, *Before the Muses*, 439.

evidently considers naming both an act of creation and an explanation of something already brought into being. For the poet, the name, properly understood, discloses the significance of the created thing.”<sup>68</sup> The text recognizes that the act of naming Lahmu and Lahamu creates the two gods as well as the fate and soul.

As Tiamat and Apsu create the other gods, the gods begin to irritate them with constant noise. Apsu then plots to kill the gods that he and Tiamat created in order to get some sleep. When the gods hear of the plot, Ea, god of wisdom and secrets, kills Apsu before any of the wrath comes to fruition. In the body of Apsu, Ea begets Marduk. Tiamat is angry at the actions that have come to pass, and releases legions of monsters and demons upon the gods. She creates a new husband, Qingu, and she bestows upon him power in the form of the Tablet of Destinies. When Ea hears of the war that Tiamat declares against the gods, he is dumbfounded. Marduk tells Ea that he will become the warrior of the gods, as long as the gods swear that he is supreme among them. Ea tells Marduk to go before Anshar. When Marduk speaks to Anshar, he states, “When I speak, let me ordain destinies and not you.”<sup>69</sup> Anshar and the gods make Marduk the god of all their destinies by stating:

You are the most important among the great gods,  
Your destiny is unrivalled, your command is supreme,  
O Marduk, you are the most important  
    among the great gods,  
Your destiny is unrivalled, your command is supreme!  
Henceforth your command cannot be changed,  
To raise high, to bring low, this shall be your power,  
Your command shall be steadfast,  
    Your word shall not be misleading.  
Not one of the gods shall go beyond the limits you set...  
...Your destiny, O Lord, shall be foremost of the gods',

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<sup>68</sup> Foster, *From Distant Days*, 9.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



Command destruction or creation, they shall take place.<sup>70</sup>

By placing their destinies in his hands, the gods give Marduk power over the order through names with his own name being the greatest; through this transfer of power, the gods grant Marduk the power of creation and destruction. With this supreme power given by the gods, Marduk's name needs not be secret from them.

Marduk orders society by first slaying chaos, Tiamat. From her corpse, he fashions all of creation. He coils up her tail and places a bind to hold heaven and earth together, and names it to strengthen the creation. Marduk's greatest accomplishment is the creation of the Euphrates and Tigris. The two rivers are the source of life in Babylon and could only be created by the supreme god. In the *Enuma Elish*, he releases the rivers from Tiamat's eyes; however, in *Marduk, Creator of the World*, a literary work that proclaims Marduk the creator, he creates the rivers himself. The text states, "He created and put in place the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, He pronounced their names with favor."<sup>71</sup> By creating the two rivers, he creates the very things that give life to Mesopotamia. From Qingu, Marduk creates and names humankind in order to sustain the gods. Finally, Marduk creates a city for the gods, and Babylon is thus named Abode of Great Gods.<sup>72</sup> Through the slaying of Tiamat and becoming king of the gods, Marduk establishes order and supremacy; however, to make all his creation and order complete, Marduk needs to name the creations and bind them to the destinies that he ordains, which is the supreme power given to him by the remainder of the gods. Marduk gives orders to the entire universe and becomes the complete embodiment of order within Babylon.

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<sup>70</sup>Foster, *Before the Muses*, 457.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 488.

<sup>72</sup>Foster, *From Distant Days*, 37.

## **Fifty Names of a God**

The fifty names describe different aspects of Marduk, although, the similarity to other gods with multiple names suggests that the plethora of names allude to one true name for Marduk. The Egyptian god Ra, who has 75 names, has one true name given at his creation, and only he and his parents know it. The Babylonian text states that Marduk's first and true name as given by his parents is Marduk. The text explains that through the first name all other names exist. The name Marduk contains "Creation, destruction, absolution, punishment," which are the folkloric concepts that sustain the balance of order.<sup>73</sup> If one name contains all order and power, why does the Babylonian text include the multiplicity of names?

The multiplicity of names could simply be a literary function used in the *Enuma Elish*. Just as the Hebrew Bible uses the name of Jacob as a narrative function, Marduk's multiplicity of names bears a similar function within the *Enuma Elish*. Foster explains this in stating:

Each of them [Marduk's names] is correlated with crucial points in the narrative as follows: (1) his birth, (2-3) his creation of the human race to provide for the gods, (4) his terrible anger but his willingness to spare the rebellious gods, (5) his proclamation by the gods as supreme among them, (6) his organization of the cosmos, (7) his saving the gods from danger, (8) his sparing the gods who fought on the side of Tiamat, but his killing of Tiamat and Qingu, and (9) his enabling the gods to proceed with the rest of what is narrated.<sup>74</sup>

Marduk's first set of names comes from the different tasks that he performed throughout the narrative. These names and Marduk's destinies become bound to Marduk by the gods as they pronounce each name at the end of the *Enuma Elish*.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 42.

The pronouncement begins with the gods stating, “Let us pronounce his fifty names, That his ways shall be (thereby) manifest, his deeds likewise (?)”<sup>75</sup> Bottéro states, “On sait que dans cette conclusion du Poème, les diverses dénominations, à peu près toutes sumériennes, données à Marduk, pour définir son ‘destin,’ par les dieux devenus ses sujets, sont énumérées, chacune à la tête d’une façon de strophe de longueur variable, qui le prend pour thème d’une paraphrase dans le registre panégyrique.”<sup>76</sup> Through this, Bottéro explains that each god submits his power to Marduk through each of the fifty names, which corresponds to the number of gods that are mentioned. In the text, each name is explained by the gods after the pronouncement, and with each explanation, a new attribute is assigned to Marduk as well as a new power. Bottéro explains the folkloristic nature of the Babylonian audience and their view of the names by stating:

Tout au contraire, ces vieilles gens s’étaient persuadés que le nom a sa source, non dans l’individu qui nomme, mais dans la chose nommée, qu’il en est une émanation inséparable, comme l’ombre portée, le calque, la traduction de sa nature: si bien qu’à leurs yeux ‘recevoir un nom’ et exister (évidemment: selon les qualités et la présentation mises en avant par ce nom), c’était tout un. Les premiers vers de l’*En.el.*, que l’on cite volontiers pour illustrer cette façon de voir, ne sont qu’une pièce d’un immense dossier, qu’il paraît inutile de déployer ici. Du moins cette conception réaliste de l’onomastique, du vocabulaire, éclate-t’elle, plus nettement peut-être que n’importe où ailleurs, dans notre ‘commentaire’: on y a vu que chaque Nom de Marduk, contient, réellement et matériellement, tous les pouvoirs, les mérites, les prérogatives, les qualifications qu’il définit de ce dieu et que leur total fabuleux de Cinquante pour lui tout seul nous permet ainsi, non seulement de reconnaître en lui une ‘personnalité extraordinaire’ (VII 144), même sur le plan divin, mais d’acquérir de cette personnalité une connaissance approfondie.

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<sup>75</sup>Foster, *Before the Muses*, 473.

<sup>76</sup>Jean Bottéro, "Les Noms De Marduk, L'Écriture Et La 'Logique' En Mésopotamie Ancienne," in *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein*, ed. Maria de Jong Ellis (Hamden: Archon, 1977), 15.

Le contexte de la Liste des Noms laisse également mieux percevoir à quoi, en définitive, chacun doit sa valeur: c'est que chacun exprime une volonté et une décision particulière des dieux concernant celui qui en est le sujet: chacun définit son destin.<sup>77</sup>

Bottéro shows how the Babylonian audience would receive each name as a manifestation of Marduk's power over chaos and its ability to keep order in society. He also explains that the audience receives each name as a piece of Marduk's overall power and that his names carry his complete destiny in full. Bottéro previously stated that the names of Marduk show, "que chacun de ces Noms--comme l'universel renferme le particulier--*contient* la totalité des attributs, des qualités, des mérites et des hauts-faits de ce dieu: bref, de sa *Nature* telle que le Poème la détaille."<sup>78</sup> He is simply stating that though one name can differ greatly from another the audience will see each name as a complete embodiment of one single god.

Many of Marduk's names are pronouncements that glorify his defeat over Tiamat or describe his ability as a great warrior and destroyer, but several of his names describe his ability to sustain order. One such name is NARI-LUGALDIMMERANKIA, which means instructor of all the gods. The name is given to Marduk for his dividing the gods between the Igigi and Anunna gods and for creating dwellings for them in the netherworld and in heaven. Another name is NAMTILA, which is given to the god who maintains life. Several of Marduk's names also explain his life giving powers and his power to sustain humanity and crops. The text states, "The great gods called his fifty names "The Fifty," they made his position supreme."<sup>79</sup> The final pronouncement and naming of the entire collection of names completes Marduk's rule over the gods and

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 484.

through that his rule over order in the universe. The Babylonian Akitu festival every year commemorated the rule of Marduk and his gift of order, and the followers in Babylon read the names to invoke his power as supreme ruler of the gods.

### **Marduk the Invulnerable**

Like Ra's story and the narrative of Jacob and the stranger, the Babylonian mythos includes secrets, but not regarding the name of Marduk. Ea, father of Marduk, is the god of secrets. In order to give power to Marduk, Ea summons Marduk into his secret place and telling him his secret words.<sup>80</sup> At the end of the *Enuma Elsh*, Ea gives Marduk his own name, and transfers his power of secrecy, magic, and wisdom to Marduk. Like the folkloristic concept of secret knowledge of the Ancient Near East, Babylon also holds, as central, the belief that secret knowledge maintains order of a society; in Babylonian stories, Marduk is the holder of secrets. Piotr Michalowski states, "Chaos is envisioned as an absence and presence is linked to naming."<sup>81</sup> Through his naming and his presences, Marduk establishes and sustains order, but Marduk's continued presence is necessary for order; if he leaves, order becomes chaos. For example, in the story of Erra and Ishum, Marduk describes a time when he left the world and then the deluge resulted.<sup>82</sup> Erra convinces Marduk to descend his throne in order to repair his image, and chaos reigns on the earth. The text conveys an image of reversal of divine order:

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<sup>80</sup> Foster, *From Distant Days*, 21.

<sup>81</sup> Piotr Michalowski, "Presence at the Creation," in *Lingering over Words*, ed. John Huehnergard Tzvi Abusch, and Piotr Steinkeller (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 385.

<sup>82</sup> Marduk describes his leaving on page 887 of Foster's *Before the Muses*. The deluge does not necessarily mean the flood, but truly means catastrophic events on earth; however, the flood seems a result of this event. Whether or not this is the flood and catastrophe of Utnapishtim in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is debated.

(When) I rise [from my dwelling,  
the regulation [of heaven and earth] will disintegrate,  
The [waters will rise and sweep over the land,  
Bright [day will turn to dar[k]ness,  
[Wh]irlwind will rise and the star of heaven will [ ],  
Ill winds will blow  
and the eyesight of living creatures [will be darkened?]  
Demons will rise up and seize [ ],  
[They will...] the unarmed one who confronts them!  
The gods of hell will rise up and smite down living creatures.<sup>83</sup>

To attempt to gain Marduk's secret knowledge and his power would completely disrupt the divine order that Marduk maintains by his presence, and no god or man could take that power or would risk the consequences of destroying creation. Even though Erra convinces Marduk to leave, Marduk returns and restores the order that was in place.<sup>84</sup> The story explicitly shows how Marduk's name needs not remain secret even though it contains the power over the order of society.

Unlike other gods and lesser deities in the Ancient Near East, the lack of secret names for Marduk explains his invulnerability. In the story of Ra and Isis, Ra is depicted as a drooling god who is old beyond his years, and thus vulnerable. The stranger wrestling Jacob is limited by certain aspects of nature, namely dawn, and is a being that is more than a man but lesser than an angel, and thus vulnerable. However, Marduk is a supreme god and is not vulnerable. Marduk has no one that could use his name against him. The gods give all the power to Marduk by pronouncing his fifty names and thus bind themselves to Marduk. To eliminate Marduk would eliminate all of the gods. Also, Marduk possesses the name SHAZU, which is the one who knows the heart of the gods.<sup>85</sup> Through this and his secret knowledge of Ea, he protects himself from all of the gods.

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<sup>83</sup> Foster, *Before the Muses*, 889.

<sup>84</sup> In the end of the story, Erra rampages and attacks all of creation, but finds the error of his ways and eventually blesses Babylon and order is restored.

<sup>85</sup> Foster, *Before the Muses*, 477.

He has knowledge that other gods do not possess and this gives him power over them.

The last lines of the text explain that his followers study and recite his names, for he and his name are invulnerable and will keep order forever:

They must be grasped: the "first one" should reveal (them),  
The wise and knowledgeable should ponder (them) together,  
The master should repeat, and make the pupil understand.  
The "shepherd," the "herdsman" should pay attention,  
He must not neglect the Enlil of the gods, Marduk,  
So his land may prosper and he himself be safe.  
His word is truth, what he says is not changed,  
Not one god can annul his utterance.  
If he frowns, he will not relent,  
if he is angry, no god can face his rage.  
He before whom crime and sin must appear for judgment.  
The revelation (of the names) that the "first one"  
discoursed before him (Marduk),  
He wrote down and preserved for the future to hear,  
The [wo]rd of Marduk who created the Igigi-gods,  
[His/Its ] let them [ ], his name let them invoke.  
Let them sound abroad the song of Marduk,  
How he defeated Tiamat and took kingship.<sup>86</sup>

With this statement, the name Marduk contains all the folkloristic concepts of power that are used to sustain order in the Ancient Near East. The invulnerable Marduk slays Tiamat and establishes order of Ancient Babylon and forever keeps this order through his fifty names.

Like the creation story in Genesis 1, the *Enuma Elish* depicts a world that is chaotic until someone names all of creation. Like Elohim, Marduk divides the world, creates humans, and names all of creation; constantly reinforced by Marduk's multiplicity of names. As a gift for slaying Tiamat, the gods bestow the power of destinies on Marduk and make him the ruler of the gods. The act establishes order among the heavens and his fifty names attest to the order. Every time the Akitu festival occurs, Marduk's

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 484-485.

followers praise his fifty names for their establishment of order in the world. The text reveals the folkloristic concepts of the Ancient Near Eastern city of Babylon, and how the power of names and naming is the force that keeps order from falling into chaos. Names forever bind people, deities, animals, concepts, and the universe to specific roles that are unchangeable by lesser beings and keeps society ordered. Unlike Ra and the stranger who wrestles Jacob, Marduk's name is not secret, for there is no one who would disrupt order or has the power to take Marduk's supremacy over the gods.



## CHAPTER V

### YHWH AND THE POWER OF THE NOT-SO SECRET NAME

The folkloristic concepts in the Ancient Near East, like the power of naming and the hierarchical system of chaos and order, seem to transfer from different empires such as between Judah, Egypt, and Babylon. Considering the proximity of Egypt and the interaction between Babylon and Judah, it is not surprising that the different powers would hold similar folkloric beliefs. The Hebrew Bible obviously absorbs similar folkloristic beliefs, as demonstrated in the analysis of Jacob's narrative and the similarities to the folkloristic system of naming that exists in the Legend of Isis and Ra of Egypt and Marduk's epic, the *Enuma Elish* of Babylon.

With the biblical narratives containing folkloristic concepts, how does the Hebrew Bible approach the naming of the principal deity of the Israelites? The name of YHWH is treated by the composers of the Hebrew Bible in a way that blends the ordering elements of Marduk's names and the secret names like Ra and Jacob's stranger. Marduk's name constantly binds chaos and followers invoke the name to celebrate order in society. YHWH's name holds similar controlling qualities. However, YHWH's name holds many secret qualities that prevent it from being as public as Marduk's name. YHWH's followers in the Hebrew Bible do not mention the name of their deity and attempt to keep it secret from public knowledge.

The several interactions between Moses and YHWH during the book of Exodus attest to the folkloristic qualities that inform the name of YHWH. The name, as well as

the figure of YHWH, creates order and binds chaos. Scholars continually interpret the meaning of the name as it changes with the character of YHWH in the unfolding Exodus narrative. The interaction in Exodus 3: 14-15, when YHWH reveals the play on his name to Moses, is the instance in which YHWH's name is first described as a secret name. YHWH uses a play on words to prevent his name from being revealed but employs a meaning that the Israelites will understand. YHWH also creates commandments in which his name should not be invoked or misused, which becomes the statute for keeping his name secret. Followers invoke the name of YHWH as a celebration of YHWH's name and its conquests bind chaos, and they hope that the name will continue to bring order to society.

### **YHWH the Warrior against Chaos**

Among scholars, there is debate whether YHWH was the god worshiped by all the Israelites. The Documentary Hypothesis uses textual evidence to assert that there were two main names of gods of Israel, YHWH in Judah and Elohim in Israel.<sup>87</sup> Whether or not all biblical scholars accept this theory, the writers of Exodus make it clear that YHWH is the main god of Israel with Exodus 3:6. When YHWH appears before Moses in the form of the burning bush, YHWH states, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." YHWH also says in Exodus 6: 2-3, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them." Raymond Abba believes that the new name signifies a set of new qualities that the god YHWH will exhibit and that the other names were other qualities that this name will now assume. He renders the passage

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<sup>87</sup> Or some form of the name incorporating El, such as El Shaddai or El Elyon.

in a way that adds the word character before El Shaddai and then states, “God did not reveal to them those qualities of his Being which are signified by this name.”<sup>88</sup> However, these passages are not as simple as Abba believes because YHWH becomes the god of the ancestors of the Israelites and assumes all the characteristics of Elohim or the name El Shaddai, presented in Genesis as a creator or destroyer. To understand more fully the folkloristic concept of the name of YHWH, the characteristics portrayed by the text must be analyzed and the origin of the figure YHWH must be examined.

Where did YHWH come from and how old is the name? These two questions seem to have plagued the mind of scholars for ages and probably cannot be answered. Scholars cannot date the final form of YHWH presented in Exodus.<sup>89</sup> Raymond Abba states, “Its form is archaic, retaining the ך which was later replaced by a ך in the verb ךך with which the name is connected—a change that took place long before the time of Moses.”<sup>90</sup> However, his theory on this archaic form is simply speculation. Many other forms of the name are also found, including ךך, which is found in many theophoric names, especially Elephantine. E.C.B. MacLaurin points to Yaw and Yam as earlier forms of YHWH.<sup>91</sup> Also, other biblical scholars look to the figures in Genesis, such as Enosh or the patriarchs, who interact with YHWH and use their story as an attestation to

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<sup>88</sup> Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 4 (Dec., 1961), 323. His passage reads: “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob in the character of El Shaddai, but (in the character of) my name Yahweh I did not become known to them.” He probably renders this passage in attempt to gloss the text. He is probably uncomfortable that YHWH makes it seem that the Israelites did not know YHWH.

<sup>89</sup> The form YHWH is also used throughout the book of Genesis. The passage mentioned above (Exodus 6:2-3) seems to imply that this instance in Exodus is the first time that the name is revealed to humans. However, it may be an authorial technique of simply mentioning the god of the Israelites as a further attestation of the late time Genesis, Exodus, and the rest of the Torah was written, or it is further evidence of the documentary hypothesis and the author J.

<sup>90</sup> Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 322.

<sup>91</sup> E. C. B. MacLaurin, “Yhwh, the Origin of the Tetragrammaton,” *Vetus Testamentum* 12, no. 4 (Oct., 1962), 449.

the ancient nature of the name.<sup>92</sup> However, YHWH's interaction with the figures in Genesis is simply a reflection of the author and the date the text was written and not an ancient clue. The Mesha inscription, dated around 830 B.C.E., also contains the complete form of the sacred name YHWH and is the first unequivocal time that a non-Israelite uses the name. This is the only date that we can attest for certain for the final form of the divine name. However, since the date cannot be pinpointed, scholars do attempt to place an origin on the figure of YHWH.<sup>93</sup>

One theory that is prevalent is the Kenite (or Qenite) hypothesis that places YHWH as the god of Jethro and the Midianites. Raymond Abba states:

According to the Kenite hypothesis, Yahweh was originally the God of the Kenites, a Midianite clan into which Moses married. In support of this theory it is pointed out that the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites is Cain, who is said to have borne the mark of Yahweh, and that Jethro's delight at the news of Yahweh's deliverance of Israel, together with the fact that he officiates at the sacrifice which follows, imply that Yahweh was Jethro's God.<sup>94</sup>

The Kenite theory assumes that YHWH is unknown to Moses until he meets his father-in-law and then makes YHWH known to the Israelite slaves. This theory pleases some scholars with its link of YHWH back to the patriarchs. The scholars that agree with this proposal generally oppose the theory of YHWH being of Canaanite origin.

The other main theory is that YHWH is in the Canaanite pantheon and the Israelites absorbed this pantheon during the Exodus. Albright offers the theory that "it is probable that the view that *Yawe*h is an expansion of *Yahu*, itself the name of some

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<sup>92</sup> See Charles R. Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name Yhwh," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142, no. 565 (January-March 1985).

<sup>93</sup> Sigmund Freud also offers insight into the monotheistic god of Moses in *Moses and Monotheism*. His theory portrays Moses as a Priest during the reign of Akhenaton, and once the king and his heirs are no longer on the throne, Moses needs a following for the monotheism that Akhenaton was preaching. He comes up with the god, YHWH, and he takes this god to the Hebrew slaves. Thus, YHWH, the Israelite god, comes into existence.

<sup>94</sup> Raymond Abba, "The Divine Name Yahweh," 320.

hitherto unidentified non Semitic god of early Syria.”<sup>95</sup> Albright generally assumed that YHWH was a native god without even comparing mythology or examining various gods of Canaan. MacLaurin, however, offers a similar theory behind YHWH’s Canaanite origin out of a comparison of gods. He believes that YHWH is a form of Yaw and may be derived from the Ugaritic sea god Yam, and, from this, his assertion is that YHWH is a storm god and the son of El, who constantly is in contention with the other son of El in Canaanite lore: Ba’al.<sup>96</sup> Some scholars accept the theory that YHWH was a storm god of southern Canaan and that the constant prescriptions against Ba’al and his cult result in the fact that Ba’al is the other storm deity of Canaan that was worshiped in the North. It is quite possible that YHWH and Ba’al are mirror images of each other. Cross states, “In the earliest poetic sources the language depicting Yahweh as divine warrior manifest is borrowed almost directly from Canaanite descriptions of the theophany of Ba’al as storm god.”<sup>97</sup> The idea that YHWH and Ba’al are similar storm gods explains much of the tension between the cults as well as the characterization that YHWH assumes.

In all likelihood, YHWH is the storm god adopted by Israelites from the pantheon of the area, and the biblical text itself offers a characterization typical of a storm god who champions chaos and brings order to the world. This is evident in Psalm 18:8-16

The earth quaked and shook;  
The foundations of the mountains shuddered;  
They quaked when his wrath waked hot.  
Smoke rose from his nostrils  
And fire from his mouth devoured;  
Coals flamed forth from him.  
He spread apart the heavens and descended,

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<sup>95</sup> William Foxwell Albright, "Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43, no. 3/4 (1924), 370.

<sup>96</sup> MacLaurin, "Yhwh," 449-450.

<sup>97</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 147.T

A storm cloud under his feet.  
He rode a cherub and flew  
He soared on the wings of the wind.  
He set darkness round about him,  
His pavilion is the raincloud.  
Cloud-banks were before him,  
Before him his clouds raced by,  
Hail and coals of fire.  
From the heavens Yahweh thundered,  
And 'Elyon gave forth his voice.  
He shot forth his arrows and scattered them,  
Lightning-bolts he flashed and put them in panic.  
The sources of the sea were exposed;  
The foundations of the world laid bare;  
At your roar, O Yahweh,  
At the windy blast of your nostrils.<sup>98</sup>

The psalm portrays all necessary aspects of a storm god: the control of lightning, flying upon clouds, the shaking of the earth from thunder, an appearance smoke and fire, and the ability to plunge the world in perpetual darkness. Like in Psalm 18, the storm god's properties are found throughout the Hebrew Bible. YHWH lands upon Sinai in a burning cloud, leads the Israelites by a cloud of smoke or fire, has the ability to cause a great flood from constant rain, and has the power to part great seas with divine wind. Apparently, YHWH is none other than a great storm god who masters chaos and unleashes his power upon the world; however, the various texts of the Hebrew Bible give YHWH several other divine characteristics.

For example, Psalm 29 attributes the characteristics of a divine warrior and king to YHWH. Psalm 29 states:

Ascribe to Yahweh, O sons of 'El,  
Ascribe to Yahweh glory and might;  
Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due his name.  
Fall down before Yahweh who appears in holiness!  
The god of the Glory thunders,

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<sup>98</sup> Psalm 18:8-16 as translated by Frank Moore Cross in Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 159. All syntax and spelling attributed to Cross.

The voice of Yahweh is on the Waters,  
 Yahweh is upon the Deep Waters.  
 The voice of Yahweh is mighty; the voice of Yahweh is majestic  
 The voice of Yahweh splinters the cedars;  
 He makes Lebanon dance like a bullcalf  
 Sirion like a young buffalo.  
 The voice of Yahweh strikes with flaming fire,  
 <The voice of Yahweh> drenches the forests.  
 The voice of Yahweh makes the desert writhe;  
 Yahweh makes the Holy Desert to writhe;  
 Yahweh makes the hinds to writhe (that is, calve).  
 In his temple (his) Glory appears!  
 Yahweh sits enthroned on the Flooddragon;  
 Yahweh is enthroned, king forever.<sup>99</sup>

Psalm 29 describes YHWH, the storm god, returning from a glorious battle with great rejoicing. The most important aspect of this psalm is the depiction of the divine king of heaven. Cross states, “One finds its place in the great cosmogonic myth in which the storm god, overcoming the powers of chaos (Tiamat, Yamm, or Môt according to the myth), usually in individual combat, establishes kingship and with it the order of heaven and the earth.”<sup>100</sup> The divine king is the hero who slays chaos and brings divine kingship and order to the world, such as Marduk slaying Tiamat. Psalm 29 rejoices YHWH as the divine warrior who slays chaos and brought divine kingship.<sup>101</sup> Like Marduk, YHWH brings the order to the human world through his many mitzvot.

The events that occur at Sinai are an important characterization of YHWH’s divine kingship. As the gods of Mesopotamia intend to order the human world in the image of the divine, the god conquers the chaos of the human world by instituting laws. Like Marduk ordering society through his names and Shamash through his laws, YHWH

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<sup>99</sup> Psalm 29 as translated by Frank Moore Cross in Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 155. All syntax and Cross’s.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>101</sup> The allusion to Leviathan the sea serpent found in Job is also a depiction of YHWH slaying chaos to bring order to the world.

also takes on the role of Mesopotamian god and gives order to existence. As YHWH descends upon Mount Sinai in a fiery cloud, Moses ascends willing to gain the order that the divine warrior king promises. Just as Anu and Enlil gave the laws to Hammurabi, YHWH gives the Ten Commandments to Moses and the Israelites and establishes the hierarchy of power.

As the first commandment states that only YHWH will be worshipped by the Israelites, the authors of Exodus complete the cycle of associating the various divine names as characteristics of YHWH. Just as the passages in Exodus 6 establish YHWH as god of the Patriarchs, it also legitimizes YHWH as the supreme creator. In Genesis, YHWH is the creator of Adam, Eve, and Eden. Now not only does YHWH establish order through the Ten Commandments, but YHWH is the creator and governor of everything. YHWH assumes the same role as Marduk as a Mesopotamian god that assumes multiple characteristics in the various names and attestations associated with him. Through each characteristic and association that Exodus links together, the divine name YHWH carries each aspect as power contained within the essence of the sacred name.

### **The Meaning of the Name**

Although this thesis is an attempt to analyze the folkloric aspect of the secrecy of YHWH's name, the search for a meaning of the name needs an examination.

Historically, scholars attempted to decipher the meaning of the name from the puzzling dialogue between Moses and YHWH in Exodus 3: 13-14. It is probable that the dialogue is an attempt to deter the revelation of the true name. Scholars do not agree on the origin



of the divine name; however, the general tendency is to continue to translate the name through various textual analyses and generally begin with the root word, **היה**.

The Hebrew **היה**, or *hyh*, generally translates as the verb “to be,” hence the traditional translation of the divine name **יהוה**, or YHWH, as “I am.” The rendering of “I am” comes from the idea that the term is an imperfect Qal verb. The **ו** makes the term a third person verb and would be translated as “he is,” but “I am” comes from the response that YHWH gives Moses in Exodus 3:14. YHWH states gives **יהוה** as his name, which is in first person. As mentioned before, Albright believes that the keeping of the **ו** is an attestation to the archaic form of the word.<sup>102</sup> However, this theory has many detractors, such as MacLaurin, who states, “The root of the verb ‘to be’ is *hyh*, and there is no evidence that it was ever *hwh* in Canaanite.”<sup>103</sup> Given this doubt, MacLaurin offers a new theory:

Some scholars have seen in the Name a cognate of the Ugaritic-Assyrian root *hwy* (to reveal or proclaim; *hwt*: speech, word): a noun formed from this root is found in eighteen places in the Old Testament and Guillaume believes it is a magical term; in any case, it would certainly form a suitable name for a God whose character is that He reveals Himself.<sup>104</sup>

MacLaurin offers different words that could be the true root of YHWH, but, even with all his evidence, it is difficult to refute the argument put forth by Haupt, Albright, and Freedman.

Haupt, Albright, and Freedman assert that the divine name YHWH is a causative form (hiph’il) of *hyh*. Freedman states, “2) that it is a verb derived from the root *\*hwy* >

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<sup>102</sup> Albright, “Contributions to Biblical Archaeology,” 370.

<sup>103</sup> MacLaurin, “YHWH,” 440.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

\**hwh*, which in accordance with recognized linguistic laws appears in biblical Hebrew as *hyh*; 3) that it is a Hiph'il impf. 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sing. Form of the verb; and 4) that it is to be translated, 'He causes to be, he brings into existence; he brings to pass, he creates.'"<sup>105</sup> Freedman's work generally is an extension of Albright's general assertions. Albright, in response to scholars with opinions like MacLaurin, believes that the best translation is creator from the causative tense of "to be." Albright asserts

'He who causes to be, brings into existence.' The principal objection raised to this interpretation seems to be that it is too abstract to have originated among the Hebrews of the second millennium B.C., and that concrete explanations like 'the one who blows,' from Arab. *hawa*, 'blow,' or 'the one who falls,' from Heb. *hawah*, Arab. *hawa*, 'to fall' are more plausible for so early a period.<sup>106</sup>

Some scholars believe that the abstract thought of associating the hifil form of "to be" as creator is impossible for a simple society like the Israelites. Mowinkel responds to Albright by stating, "The idea 'He who causes to be, who brings into existence,' seems to me much too philosophical and abstract in relation to the religious interests of the 'primitive' pre-Mosaic age."<sup>107</sup> However, to assume that an ancient culture has no abstract thinking ability is unfounded.

Cross also concurs with Albright and Freedman, but he addresses the verb formula of the name of YHWH. He says:

Our evidence also points strongly to the conclusion that *yahwê* is a shortened form of a sentence name taken from a cultic formula. An ample number of parallels may be found in which West Semitic divine names are the first elements, frequently a verbal element in view of West Semitic syntax, of a sentence name from a litany or cultic cliché.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> David Noel Freedman, "The Name of the God of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79, no. 2 (1960), 152.

<sup>106</sup> Albright, "Contributions to Biblical Archaeology," 374-375.

<sup>107</sup> Sigmund O. P. Mowinkel, "The Name of the God of Moses," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32, no. (1961), 128.

<sup>108</sup> Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 66.

This form is similar to the formula used in naming Jacob, which is another imperfect verb. In Jacob's story, the verb יִעֲקֹב, he grabs, is grabbing Esau's heel. Cross assumes that the formula is synonymous and there was a direct object to the "he creates." Despite points of overlap, it is quite obvious that no scholar is in complete agreement on the meaning of the divine name. In fact, while addressing this topic, MacLaurin asserts, "The attempts to explain the meaning of the name YHWH are innumerable."<sup>109</sup> The meaning of the divine name eludes scholars just as YHWH puzzles Moses with his cryptic message in Exodus. The entire point of the confusion portrayed in the dialogue between Moses and YHWH is the folkloristic secrecy applied to the divine name and even today the meaning of the name remains secret from scholars.

### **The Dialogue between Moses and YHWH**

YHWH's divine name contains the very essence of all the characteristics of the creator, storm god that champions chaos and brings order to the world. One can expect when asking the name of this great and powerful god to get a swift rebuttal. In Exodus 3:14 when Moses asks the name of this great and mighty god that will deliver the Israelites, YHWH replies אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, which translates: "I am what I am," or "I create what I am."<sup>110</sup> YHWH shifts the divine name from third person imperfect to first person, but it still remains in a verbal form. The form the verb split into two separated by אֲשֶׁר (that) could be interpreted as a single concept, such as I am, I create, or, simply, creator. Like the meaning of YHWH, scholars have continuously argued about the significance of the statement.

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<sup>109</sup> MacLaurin, "YHWH," 441.

<sup>110</sup> Taking into count the many translation issues mentioned in the previous section.

Some scholars consider this statement to be an attempt to keep the sacred name secret. Raymond Abba states, “The divine answer to Moses is a virtual rebuff implying, ‘It does not concern you.’”<sup>111</sup> As Abba puts it, the answer given by YHWH is comparable to the answer given by the spirit who wrestled Jacob: “I cannot tell you my name!” Just as Ra and the stranger attempt to keep their names secret, YHWH uses this rebuttal to protect his name from Moses. Agreeing with this idea, Brevard Childs states, “God said to Moses, ‘I will be how I will be.’ The word-play on the name of God (*‘ehyeh-yahweh*) is paradoxically both an answer and a refusal of an answer.” Simply, YHWH refuses to give his powerful name to Moses or the Israelites at this time.

The dialogue between Moses and YHWH is a convoluted and confusing conversation in which the concept of the name is revealed but the name itself is not. When Moses asks for the name, he wants a response to give the Israelites, but a higher deity cannot reveal his/her name to a lesser being for fear of entrapment or stolen power. Many scholars do not recognize the secret name aspect of the discussion and simply assume the dialogue is a way to confuse people about the meaning of the name. Mowinckel believes that the meaning of the name is more sacred than the name itself and ignores the concept of secrecy. He states:

A man who knows the “real” deeper meaning of the name of a god, really “knows the god” in question. The old Israelites hardly knew that the name of Yahweh really meant in the scientific, etymological sense of the word. What mattered was the *meaning* that the inspired and “wise” knower of God could *find* in it...It was not the name of Yahweh, which was revealed to Moses here—that was known already by Enosh centuries before—but the deeper meaning, which according to Yahwistic tradition and the theology of the “school” of J, was hidden in the name.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” 324.

<sup>112</sup> Mowinckel, “The Name of God of Moses,” 126.

Mowinckel assumes that the definition given to Moses was the essence of the name, and this is simply not likely. He believes that Moses was chosen by YHWH who bestowed upon him a blessing that the Israelites did not understand before. To Mowinckel, the Israelites see that Moses knows the name and even has the meaning as proof of his relationship with their god. However, the divine name contains the essence of the god itself, and the simple meaning given by YHWH is only a fraction of the power held within. However, if YHWH revealed the true essence and the true name, he would give his power over to the Israelites and to Moses, which is exactly what he does on Sinai.

### **The Not-So Secret Name and Commandments against Profaning the Name**

The dialogue between Moses and YHWH is YHWH's attempt to keep the name secret before a man who had yet to prove himself before the mighty god who promises salvation. However, after trial and tribulation, YHWH delivers the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and slew Pharaoh's army at the Sea of Reeds, and Moses and the Israelites prove to be a worthy people of a new covenant and worthy of receiving the divine name. Led to the holy mountain of Sinai by the storm god, Moses and the Israelites prepare to receive order from their god who conquers chaos. When Moses receives the commandments upon the mountain, the viewing of YHWH's backside is traditionally the moment that signifies YHWH's blessing of the new covenant; however, the most powerful blessing that YHWH bestows is the pronouncing of the sacred name.

In Exodus 33:19, YHWH explains that he will pass before Moses and then states, “**וּקְרָאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנָיךָ**,” which means, YHWH will proclaim/invoke the divine

name before Moses. In this instance, YHWH reveals the divine name to Moses for the first time, which no longer makes it a secret. Terence Fretheim says:

Giving the name entails a certain kind of relationship; it opens up the possibility of, indeed admits a desire for, a certain intimacy in relationship. A relationship without a name inevitably means some distance; naming the name is necessary for closeness. Naming makes true encounter and communication possible. Naming entails availability. By giving the name, God becomes accessible to people. God and people can now meet one another and there can be address on the part of both parties. Yet, because name is not person, there remains an otherness, even a mystery about the one who is named...Naming also entail vulnerability. In becoming so available to the world, God is to some degree at the disposal of those who can name the name. God's name may be misused and abused as well as honored. For God to give the name is to open himself up to hurt. Naming entails the likelihood of divine suffering, and so this act of name-giving is decisively continuous with 3:7: "I know their suffering." This shows why there is a commandment regarding the name of God.<sup>113</sup>

The act of giving the divine names seals the covenant that is made between Moses and YHWH. YHWH is now vulnerable to the beck and call of the Israelites, and the Israelites must answer for the actions that they perform in the divine name, which is exactly why commandments are put into place to keep the name from being profaned and misused.

Within the Ten Commandments, YHWH instructs Moses not to misuse the name in any way and exclaims that YHWH will not forgive anyone who misuses the name. Martin Rose states, "The prohibition in the Decalogue of misusing the name of Yahweh was originally oriented against magical practices, but in the course of the interpretation of the law it became the occasion of eventually denying any use of the divine name."<sup>114</sup> YHWH is protecting the name from any person who would use the name specifically as a weapon or in order to capture YHWH's power, an idea that is reiterated in Deuteronomy

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<sup>113</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, ed. Jr. James Luther Mays and Patrick D. Miller, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1991), 65.

<sup>114</sup> Martin Rose, "Names of God," 1010.

5:11. With the power that YHWH uses to sustain order and prevent chaos, it is possible that YHWH did not fear the misuse of the name, for no human would want to suffer the consequence of chaos upon the world.

The purpose of this event was much like Marduk giving his name to the Babylonians. The name invokes the power in which YHWH used to save the Israelites from bondage, to bind chaos, and to create all existence. The misuse of the name would certainly unleash a calamity upon the world that no human would want to suffer; thus, the name is safe for the Israelites to keep. However, the Israelites did not use the name for every occasion. Events were said to have taken place in the divine name, such as the building of temples and mounting war campaigns; however, the name was probably not proclaimed openly by every Israelite general or builder.

Most scholars speculate that the name was once vocal and later became ineffable as Judaism becomes more developed. The YHWH states, “The correct pronunciation of the name was lost from Jewish tradition some time during the Middle Ages; late in the period of the Second Temple the name had come to be regarded as unspeakably holy and therefore unsuitable for use in public reading, although it continued to be used privately.”<sup>115</sup> This assumes that the name was not an old, unknown form and that it was used frequently by the Israelites until the religion became developed in the Second Temple period. MacLaurin expands this idea by stating:

We are not dealing with some remote prehistoric term but with a Sacred Name given to a literate people in historic times, and it is unthinkable that the meaning, if any, should have been lost with some obscure root which must be sought in the cognate languages. It is much more likely that the meaning was plain to all until

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<sup>115</sup>.David Noel Freedman, H. Ringgren, and M.P. O'Conner, "Yhwh," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Helmer Ringgren, G. Johannes Botterweck, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 500.

the tradition arose that the Name was too sacred to be pronounced by ordinary men or for some other reason fell out of use.<sup>116</sup>

However, from this analysis, I assert that the name was traditionally a secret and sacred name that was only invoked on special occasions by the Israelite community. Like narratives of Ra and the stranger who wrestled Jacob, YHWH was a name of power that held all aspects of the deity and could cause catastrophic events if misused. Like Marduk, the name was not secret to the true believers and was invoked in the yearly festival. For the Israelites, this festival was Yom Kippur when the priest was allowed to say the name once in hopes of invoking the forgiveness and graciousness in the name; however, legend states the priest required a gold thread to pull him out of the tabernacle in case the use of the name would kill him. The name YHWH becomes a not-so secret name; for every Israelite and Jew knows it; but for fear of the power of a deity who established order and created existence, the name will remain ineffable.

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<sup>116</sup> MacLaurin, "YHWH," 441-442.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

The entire world of the Ancient Near East was a vast area of interconnected peoples. The people were connected through ethnicity, proximity, geography, trade, warfare, and through folklore. It is apparent that the people mixed and mingled throughout the area for various reasons and traded products, ideas, and legends. This analysis of four pivotal stories and figures of various Ancient Near Eastern backgrounds prove that the folkloristic concept of secret names is common throughout this wide area. The analysis proves that there were various differences in the stories, but the basic was shared in common. Each story depended upon three main folk concepts that were common to the Near Eastern mind: secrecy, power, and names all participated in within a delicate system of chaos and order within each story.

Ra's story forms the background for a comparative analysis of several stories. Ancient Egyptian society had a well developed system of magic and is a rich collection of mythological narratives. The analysis reveals the purest model of secret names, within the story of Isis and Ra. Ra was supreme god of Egypt, and Isis wanted this power. To obtain the strength she desired, she only needed to steal Ra's true name. Ra's name was his true essence and soul; thus, his name contained all his power and he intended to keep it secret. However, when Isis obtains the secret name through magic and trickery, she gained his power; but the story never explains if she uses the name or not. Probably, Isis never uses the name for fear that the unbalance of power will disturb Ma'at or order of

Egyptian society. This concern for order is a common motif in the other Ancient Near East stories examined here.

In the second narrative analyzed, Jacob meets a stranger at an area of natural phenomena, the ford of Jabbok, and perceives the stranger as a god. He defeats the stranger with strength and cunning and attempts to gain the name of the deity. However, the stranger renames Jacob and will not reveal his/her own. Like Isis and Ra's story, Jacob's story illustrates that every being has a secret name that contains the essence of that being and the secret can be captured and used as power. Jacob attempts to take the stranger's name, but is unsuccessful. However, where this story expands the concept of secret names is where the stranger, who is a deity of higher power, renames Jacob, a mortal. This exemplifies the hierarchy of power and how deities can give a new aspect to a person or alter his/her soul with a blessing by changing of the name.

Next, Marduk's story delineates from the basic format established by the story of Isis and Ra. Marduk's name is not secret, and, in fact, he has fifty names that describe his essence. However, Marduk is his true name that describes his essence, and, according to the model, it should be his secret name. Marduk's power was given by the remainder of the gods, and he becomes the ruler of all existence. The gods gave their power by turning over their names to Marduk. With his names, he defeats and binds chaos, which, in turn, establishes order in the world; without Marduk's true name, all existence would crumble. Although he is the god of power and secrecy, his name does not need to be secret because his name is essential for all life to continue.<sup>117</sup> No mortal would dare attempt to take the name. He then gives his name to the city of Babylon to invoke every

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<sup>117</sup> He becomes the god of secrecy from the abilities he gains from Ea.

year as a reestablishment of the balance of chaos and order and to show that the city sustains the life of the gods.

In the final narrative, YHWH's name became an interesting case once it was analyzed. YHWH's name is an exact mix of the model put forth by Ra and also a known name of power like Marduk's. YHWH's name is a secret name. It is not to be known or used by people for fear that all balance will be lost. Like the stranger who wrestled Jacob, YHWH refuses to give his name to Moses in the book of Exodus. Many scholars also believe that, although YHWH is written many times in Genesis, the Hebrews want it recognized that it comes to Moses first. However, YHWH is a god much like Marduk. YHWH uses power and the divine name to create the world and to conquer chaos. The divine name contains this power and could release the chaos if misused by mortals. Oddly, YHWH gives his/her name to the Israelites at Sinai in order to establish a covenant with the people, and YHWH makes commandments under which the people could only use the name in special circumstances. Like Marduk's name, the people only use the name during the New Year festival and never use the name any other time for fear of its destructive power; thus, the name becomes the ineffable name.

Each story depicts the Ancient Near Eastern world as pendulum of order and chaos. Existence is balancing upon the fulcrum of secrecy and names and power keep the system in order. It is common throughout the folklore of each society that names contain a power that should be kept secret from enemies, foes, and fools for fear that the balancing act will topple. However, the stories and cultures analyzed are not the only societies of the Ancient Near East that kept the concept of secret names. Also, the concept evolved into many different Midrash and folklore throughout history and many

cultures around the world held folkloristic ideas about secret names. These topics were not covered in the three societies examined in this analysis. The purpose of this analysis is to show how three societies of the Ancient Near East, Egypt, Israel, and Babylon, view this world of balance and how each society believe in a common order that should be achieved and protected. More specifically, each story exemplified the concept that names hold power and contain the essence of all beings. For protection, one needs to maintain a Secret Name.

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