

EMOR

(LEVITICUS 24: 10-23)

To Say or Not To Say: A Prerequisite for Being

“Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

(PSALM 124:8)



24:10 And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and the son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp.

24:11 And the son of the Israelitish woman blasphemed the Name, and cursed; and they brought him unto Moses. And his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.

24:12 And they put him in ward, that it might be declared unto them at the mouth of the Lord.

24:13 And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying:

24:14 'Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him.

24:15 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying: Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin.

24:16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him; as well the stranger, as the home-born, when he blasphemeth the Name, shall be put to death.

24:17 And he that smiteth any man mortally shall surely be put to death.

24:18 And he that smiteth a beast mortally shall make it good: life for life.

24:19 And if a man maim his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him:

24:20 breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he hath maimed a man, so shall it be rendered unto him.

24:21 And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; and he that killeth a man shall be put to death.

24:22 Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for the home-born; for I am the Lord your God.'

24:23 And Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and they brought forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stoned him with stones. And the children of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses.

This week we find ourselves in the chapter entitled *Emor*, which is the imperative of the verb *to say*.

This is ironic since in today's Torah portion we are told that which must never be said as we encounter the first incidence of blasphemy, when God's name is profaned by a dubious character wandering with the Israelites in the wilderness.

First, let's summarize:

A man born of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father has an argument with a man of Israel.

This leads him to defile God's Name and curse an unspecified curse.

He is then placed in custody awaiting God's sentence.

Death by stoning is the decree.

Then follows what at first seems an interruption of the narrative.

Only after a reiteration of the old testament declaration of karmic justice, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life, does the narrative reach its inevitable conclusion.

The blasphemer is taken outside of the main camp, *'and the children of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses'*, stoning the blasphemer to death.

We can draw both obvious and subtle conclusions from this short story.

Regarding the blasphemer's mixed heritage, along with the warning against mixed marriage, we can see that he represents a symbol of spiritual immaturity, an egocentric ignorant of the Holiness of the Divine Name. His immaturity is also reflected in his aggressive behavior, an inability to follow the key imperative to love his neighbour as himself.

A strong equation is thus reinforced between spiritual Reverence for God and civil Respect for our Fellow Man.

(Later on, I will show how this mirroring between God's Name and ourselves, as creatures made in the divine image, has a more tangible connection than is generally assumed.)

And then there are, as always, some wonderful ironies when we look at the story in greater detail.

Underpinning the justification of capital punishment for the blasphemer is the karmic principle of like for like, eye for eye, etcetera.

We must also include then, name for name.

Here the Torah manages to have its cake and eat it too —

this is appropriate since there is a double transgression:

first, the blasphemy, then, a curse.

Thus the defiling of God's Name results in the blasphemer losing,

along with his reputation, his name altogether:

he is consigned to utter anonymity.

On the other hand, this one who curses

curses his mother for all posterity

as she is named and shamed quite comprehensively,

Shlomit bat Divri l'Mateh Dan,

Shlomit, daughter of Divri [meaning My Word!] of the tribe of Dan [meaning Judgement].

It is also revealing what is left untold in this critical incident.

What was the argument about?

Who witnessed it?

Exactly how did the blasphemer defile God's name and which name was it?

Unlike the contradictory admonition in Deuteronomy 25

to always remember to forget the Amalekites,

these omissions are in keeping with preserving the dignity of the Divine Name:

the story, in other words, does not re-enact the desecration;

our imaginations discouraged from conjuring a negative picture.

But there are hints which guide us towards understanding the vileness of the blasphemy.

The text states

Vayikov ben isha yisraelit et hashem, vaykallel,

The son of the Israelitish woman blasphemed the Name and cursed.

If we look at the verb *Vayikov* (*and he blasphemed*),
we see its root *Nokev*, Nun Kuf Vov
meaning *puncture, penetrate, perforate, pierce*,
a violent act which suggests the defilement of Rape,
especially if we consider the very similar word *Nkevah*, which means the feminine.
This sets up a connection between the Name, as God's semi-tangible presence,
and God's nurturing feminine aspect, the *Shechinah*.

I will touch further upon the partial tangibility of the Name later on,
but for now I want to point out that this puncturing and piercing by the blaspshemer
boomerangs
in the like-for-like manner of the blasphemer's death, death by stoning.
Moreover, we sense, as we saw before, that this act of deflating
refers not just to the spiritual insult
but to the curse of tearing at the fabric of the community as well.

Now initially we can't even be sure which of God's names has been desecrated
or even if it is not perhaps a human name,
for the text at first mentions only an indefinite name (*hashem*).
Yet that it is The Name of Names becomes abundantly clear later
when God twice pronounces the ultimate verdict in verse 16:

Nokev shem Adonai mot yumat,

He that blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death...

... when he blasphemes the Name he shall be put to death.

Now, in addition to specifically identifying the Name *Adonai* as the Holy Tetragrammaton, YHVH,
the verse presents us with a startling equation:
for we can link the story of the blasphemy
with the ethical insistence that punishment should equal the crime, life for life, etc.
found in the verses immediately following (verses 17-22).

In light of the principle of strictly balanced justice,
we are strongly encouraged to conclude
that decreeing death for the sin of blasphemy
is no arbitrary judgment.

Though we might have thought
that name for name would have sufficed as action and reaction,
the clear and important inference is
that the Name of God re-presents
nothing less than the Life of God.
(although I must qualify this by saying that this representation
really signifies the Name as the Life of God In Relation To Israel and Humankind,
for God of course is beyond Life and Death, as we know it).
I will explore several of the ramifications of this revelation,
but I want to make clear that this equation and the severe punishment associated with it
applies quite specifically to the Name of Names
we call the Holy Tetragrammaton, the YHVH;
though many are the important names
in Judaism and other faiths
associated with God and the Divine attributes.

First I'll remind you
that though we are accustomed to pronounce this name of God as *Adonai*,
meaning *my master*,
we must remember that this is an aural disguise;
for the mystic 4-letter name of ultimate reverence,
Yod Heh Vov Heh,
was uttered only once a year by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement
due to the Awe with which we regard it.
Known in gentile culture as Jehovah,
this is the Name referred to in the precisely relevant Third commandment,
Do not take the name of the Lord, YHVH, in vain.
It is the name used in the constantly repeated phrase
Vaydaber Adonai el Moshe, and the Lord spoke to Moses.
And this is the Name that the kabbalists believe sustains the universe
in an endless process of spirit manifesting into matter.

Now, touching on the semi-tangible aspect of Divinity I alluded to earlier,
I would like to go beyond this verbal description
and unveil a visible portrait of this Name of Names,
which may loosely be translated as 'Being'.
Follow then how this portrait further justifies the Torah's implicit claim
that the Name is akin to God's Life and a key blueprint for Life's Existence.

(Figure 1)

Here at the top we see the word in its normal printed form.
On the right, we see the 4 holy letters arranged one on top of another as a fiery icon.
On the left we have the tall format applied to a modern geometric Hebrew font
to bring out the main point I wish to convey.
If we look at the YHVH in the vertical configuration,
we can see in a new way how we are made in the Divine Image,
more literally than we might ever have imagined.
Thus this Name of Names is also a template for Adam Kadmon (First Man), the prototype of humankind.
You can see that the Yod forms the head and the neck,
attaching to the shoulders and the two arms in the shape of the next letter, the first Heh.
In between the arms, we can envision the vital core of the backbone,
a strong lynchpin within the torso, as symbolized by the interconnecting Vov.
This brings us from the shoulders to our pivotal area below,
so that the Vov then leads into the top of the second Heh as the hips,
then the second Heh continues downwards as the two lower limbs, our legs.
In this format we can see the double repetition of the letter Heh
forming our two important swivelling areas, the shoulders and hips,
attached to our vehicles of action and motion, our 4 limbs.
Of further interest is the linking we can make between the two similar letters Yod and Vov,
the Vov like a stretched-out Yod,
as this is reflected in our miraculous nervous system,
the brain and the brain stem leading into the complex extension of the spinal cord.
So by looking at the YHVH as literally embodying the image of upright intelligence,
we see that profaning the Name is more equivalent to desecrating a life
than we might have first thought.

(Figure 2)

... Amazingly, this also seems to work in Roman letters...

There are in fact many other mystic explanations of the Tetragrammaton's powerful symbolism.

(Figure 3)

One can also see the Yod or Divine Spark as the original seed,
going into the open womb of Heh,
which then becomes a new entity as the child Vov,
born into the wider womb of the material world in the second Heh.

(Figure 4)

Sometimes the second Heh, however,
which is also a single letter symbol for God,
is seen as the repetition of the pattern: father-mother-child.
This triad then becomes the new seed which continues the process of creation.
YHVH therefore shows creation as perpetually self-generating,
which, after all, is a true description of the chain of life.

Beyond these wonderful semi-tangible metaphors,
the Name represents Life in more abstract ways as well.

In fact the Name represents an essential spiritual Life-Line to us
both individually and collectively.

I deliberately repeat the word represent, because the Name makes present for us, again and again,
the grand Idea that the world is more than a collection of unrelated things.

It points us to a cohesion larger and greater than ourselves
and embodies the idea of life engaging in an ever-complexifying web of relationships.

This applies to organic life and abstract entities as well,
so that we ascend with the repetitive power of the Name in ever widening circles
and ever more inclusive communities:

from individual to family to tribe to nation to world
to the Universe

and to the all-containing Beyond.

The Name, as something not fully concrete,
is moreover the only object thoroughly worthy of our worship.

For it allows us to dispense with obsolete attachments to sacrifice, temples, etcetera --
it shifts our devotion away from those things which always bordered on idolatry.
Instead we are left with what is indestructible:
inspired words, ethical ideas and the Holy Name,
which of course form the core and substance of our current service.
Thus, the Name provides us a reference point to begin to approach the unfathomable.
It is a bridge across which we can contemplate Infinite and Eternity,
The Creative Beginning and the Unifying End,
as well as the Way itself.

* * * * *

Now, coming down from these heights,
just as I showed the real mirroring
between God as YHVH and Man as Adam Kadmon,
I want to briefly touch on the correspondence between heavenly naming
and the human equivalent, before drawing toward a close.

We all can recall that in the sublime description of Genesis,
the Universe was created by the Divine Creator
literally SAYING everything into existence.

vaYomer Elohim

[*Yomer* of course being the same root as *Emor*]

and God said...

Vayhi Cen

And it was so.

[*Vayhi* of course sharing the same root letters as YHVH, our Name of Names, Ultimate Being]

Thus the very first utterance, *And God said, Let there be light,*

followed by the confirmation *There was light...*

demonstrates the power of heavenly naming:

as the act of naming brings what is named into Being.

All of creation is depicted as being accomplished this way,
by the magical utterance of God's building blocks, our holy Hebrew letters.

What is remarkable is that our own creativity
mimics the divine in a much less cosmic yet not insignificant way.
Not much later in Genesis, it is related that humankind is given the power to name the animals,
an obvious reflection of The Creator's naming process.
This very much underplays the key fact
that we have been given the totally transformative gift of language.
In any case, from our ability to name things, two powerful miracles occur.
First the fact that we can symbolize something means
we can refer to something and think about it
even when it is not immediately present.
Thus abstract reasoning, memory, and science are born.
Secondly, it means we can communicate this to other individuals,
engendering civilization, history, and art.
This communication, moreover, can be to those who are not within our immediate radius,
either in space or in time, thus allowing for vastly broader contact
and the preservation of events and knowledge.
Understanding the endless ramifications of our ability to communicate,
we can appreciate that though a rose by any other name would in truth smell as sweet,
we would lose the joy of sharing our emotions and insights
if the rose had no name at all.
What makes us most human then is our urge to learn and to comm-unicate:
with each other in comm-unity
and with God in comm-union.

Finally, our ability to name and have names
means that, like God, we confer and possess Identity and Uniqueness
both for ourselves and for others.
Without Identity, human life would have questionable value
and for that matter, little possibility of love.
In such a context, we wouldn't care that Avram became Avraham (Holy Heh!)
or that Jacob became Israel.

On a more humorous note,
the power of naming as proffering a positive and even protective identity
can be seen
when a rural family refuses to name their animals,
knowing that they won't be able to eat them
if they do so!

Then of course there's the negative power of names,
seen in the tragic discord between rival clans:
Montagues and Capulets
Campbells and MacDonalds.
And lowest on the scale, we witness what happens when,
as in the Holocaust, we are stripped of names
and turned into numbers, a surefire method of dehumanization.
So we see how much is at stake, in a name and in our naming.

One caveat though--
as the Buddhists rightly argue, Identity can become an interfering illusion,
especially when we deny its impermanence.
We must also beware of confusing the Name of anything with its Actuality,
for this limits its Totality of Being.
Just as God can be hinted at but not be encompassed by a name,
[though these hints are a necessity for us]
neither should our own fullness or that of Nature
be suffocated by fixed labels
--a label being a name which has become inflexibly defining.
For then we fail to experience the world in all its rich immediacy
(as when we spend more time looking at the caption to a painting than the painting itself).

The truth resides I believe in being able to hold eastern and western positions simultaneously:
the glory of Personal Identity
co-existing with
the everchanging, Nameless Flow.

As we come to the end, we must ask ourselves, in classic fashion, what is the moral of our story?

I think there are (at least) two important lessons we can extract from all this.

First, just as we revere the Source of All

and the Divine Name which allows us dialogue with It,

we must respect each other as creative parts of the Divine.

Therefore, we must avoid *lashon hara* – negative gossip – or belittlement of each other's names (or the names of other creeds or cultures).

Secondly, we must recognize the grand diversity within the world's One Great Global Village, celebrating the many names which emanate from the One Name.

Yet, while we take pride in the various names that help to form our separate identities,

we steer away from rigid attachments to these temporary namings,

not arguing the merits over one little name against another.

So, along with the mystics

who sought *yichud* (*oneness*) with the Divine

by repeating permutations of God's name,

and along with singers of holy syllables everywhere,

let us declare as Elijah declared,

I will call on the name of the Lord.

Va'Ani ekra v'shem Adonai (YHVH)

And the Name

like light within darkness

dwells within the Silence,

where Perfect Peace

resounds

Baruch Hashem,

amen.

L P Navon, Ariel Reuven ben Chayim David Hacoen

delivered Shabbat Emor, 13 May 2006, 15 Iyar 5766, Gevurah b'Hod la'Omer

יהודה



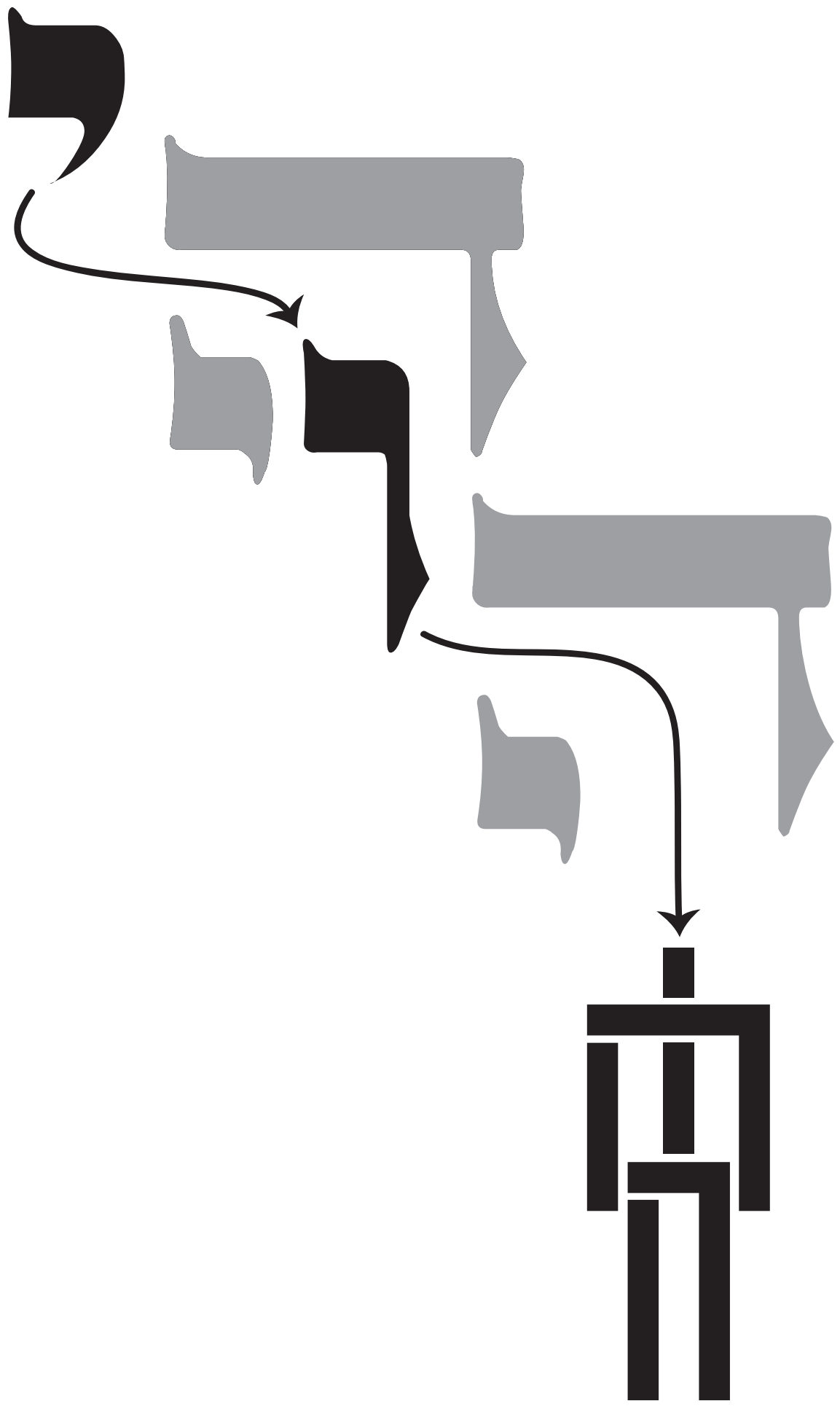
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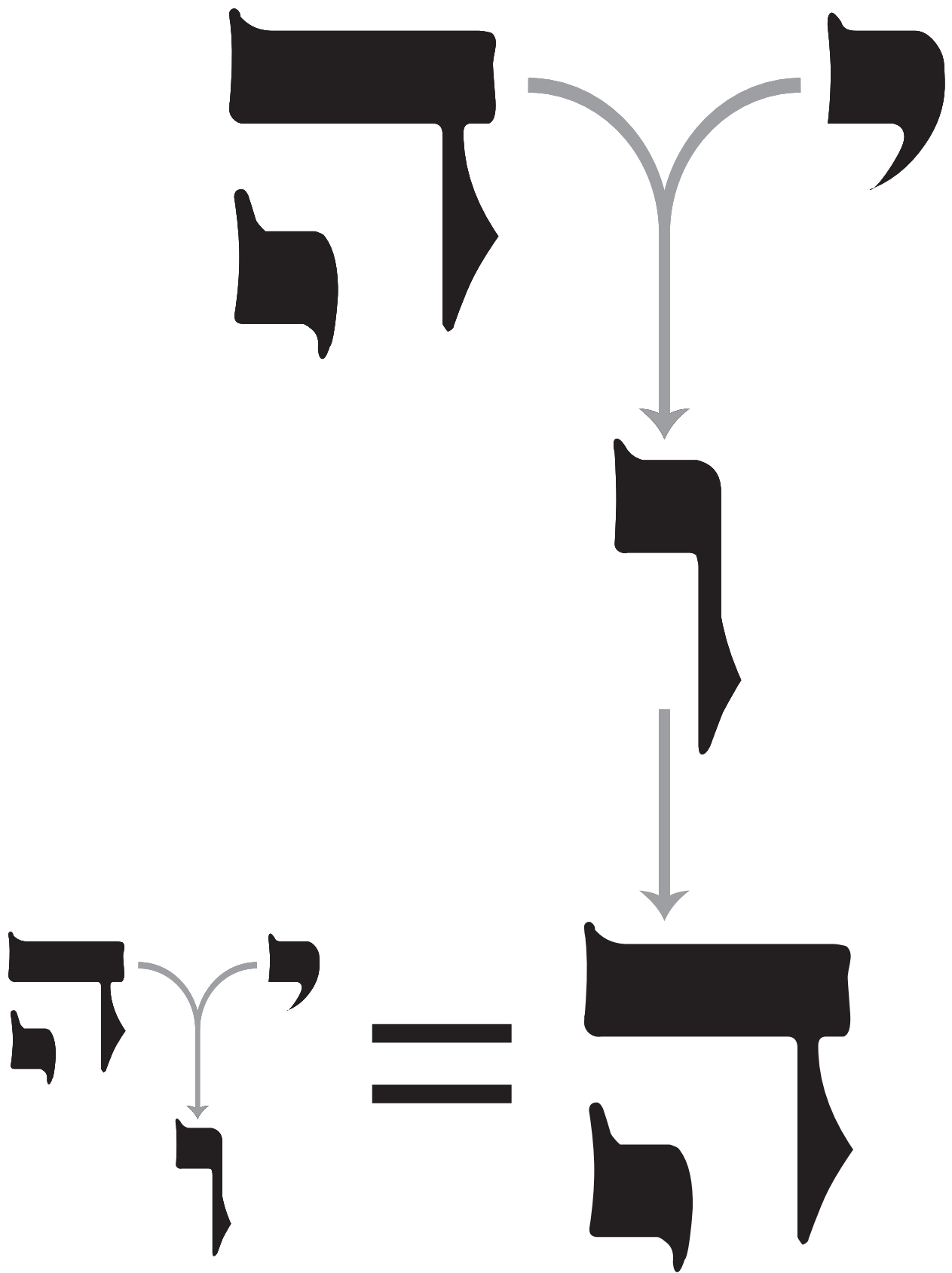




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