



## Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

### A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

## Fred & Charlie ask.....



## Sharing the word

And learning Hebrew as well...

## 'Sharing the Word...'

Fred and Charlie were having their regular mid-week 'catch-up' phone call. After sharing the latest news about who now needed Lodge care and who now was happily recuperating, Charlie was invariably tempted to seek his daily advancement in 'M.K'. Fred, surely the world's leading Masonic 'anorak', was in turn invariably happy to oblige.

*'Fred, we spoke about Jehovah'. Fred grunted a cautionary 'Ah' and waited.*

*'Well, I still don't understand why we use Jehovah as the name of the Hebrew God in daily speech, but have to share it in syllables inside a Masonic Temple. Doesn't make any sense, does it?'*

*'Could it be, Charlie, that we are talking about two quite different things?'*

*'But we're not, Fred. Jehovah is spelt J-E-H-O-V-A-H in the Bible and its spelt JE-HO-VAH on the Altar; same difference?'*

*'But they are different, Charlie. Most Masons are not Jewish and Jehovah is not "our God". Our Masonic Supreme Being has no name and never has had'.*

Charlie expressed a surprised 'Why not?'

*'For a start each and every Faith is free to join Freemasonry. Each Faith has its own way of describing its Supreme Being. Freemasons therefore provide a blanket description of them all as, 'The True and Living God Most High'. That describes them all. That includes them all'.*

*'But our Sojourners didn't find that in our ceremony, Fred, they found the letters JE-HO-VAH. If you're right about The True And Living God Most High then why do we write Jehovah?'*

Fred realised this was going to be a long call. Fortunately, Charlie was paying. He grimaced pleadingly towards his coffee cup which his wife, well understanding these things, quickly filled.

*'Charlie, let's go back to first principles. All Masons believe in a Supreme Being; right? They accept that such a Being is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent; right?'*

*Now, the Hebrews had always worshipped a Supreme Being but found great difficulty knowing how to refer to Him (or Her!). Like the Canaanites before them they first used a term that described the nature, not the name, of their God. EL was understood to signify the supreme ruler over earthly and heavenly beings and this quality of overall authority was often expanded to 'Elohim' (God)'.*

Charlie was following all this avidly. *'Is this related to 'El-elohe-Israel' then, Fred?'*

*'Spot on, Charlie. 'El-elohe-Israel' means 'El is the God of Israel' or Mighty God of Israel' (the name given by Jacob on his altar - Genesis 33:20). Moreover, in a Hebrew tradition arising from a natural veneration for one's parents and all other creators, no one was permitted to speak any name for God out-loud. So, in everyday speech and in the Hebrew Bible, 'Adonai' (the plural of 'Lord') was used when referring to God'.*

*'I often wondered where that word came from, Fred'*

*'Keep it in mind, Charlie; I'll be coming back to it! Now the vision by Moses of meeting the Supreme Being by the Burning Bush was a game-changer. While it showed a new caring and loving side of the Creator, it also indicated that He was nameless and not keen on any over-familiarity'.*

*'Why, Fred? Isn't He a loving God?'*

*'Look, Charlie. The Duke of Kent's name is Edward. Out of respect for your Grand Master when meeting him at Great Queen Street you wouldn't address him familiarly as 'Ted' or 'Ed', perish the thought. Similarly, out of respect for your Creator you don't greet Him by name as if he was your bosom friend'.*

*'Now, at the Burning Bush when Moses asked the Creator His name the reply was simply 'I AM THAT I AM'. 'I AM' is part of the verb 'to be' which is written as Y-H-W-H. The same verb also means 'to happen' or 'to create' so it also represents the word 'Creator'.*

*'In Hebrew script vowels are spoken but never written and so these written letters can be no guide to pronunciation. The letters YHWH were therefore the only symbols appropriate for the Supreme Being that could be placed on the Plate of Gold'.*

*'Fred, I'm getting lost. Where does Jehovah come in?'*

*'It's easy to be confused, Charlie. Stick with it for a moment more. As YHWH was spoken to Moses alone and never written in a complete form. Hebrew scholars tried to create a more accurate word meaning God that could be used and spoken without causing offence to Hebrew tradition. The only acceptable spoken reference to God was, of course, Adonai; I said we'd come back to it. The scholars created an artificial word by using the basic YHWH, for legitimacy, and adding to it the vowels A-O-A from Adonai, to aid pronunciation. This word became YAHOWAH and although artificial it was a word that was still close enough to YHWH to be spoken without offence. English scholars later anglicised it as JAHOVAH or Jehovah.*

*Now in our Masonic ritual we say that, "on this plate of gold is that great, awful, tremendous and incomprehensible name of the Most High. It signifies I AM THAT I AM, the Alpha and Omega etc." The only symbols that can truly represent I AM THAT I AM are YHWH (or in England JWVH) and these are the only letters that should appear on the Altar'.*

*'But, Fred, I have seen JE-HO-VAH there many times when I have visited other Chapters'.*

*'The ritual permits you to do this, Charlie. Always providing that when sharing the 'Sacred-Name' we understand that the syllables we repeat are from an artificial word 'Jehovah' as a spoken representation of JHVH, and not as any God of that name. I emphasise, Charlie, the Supreme and nameless Being can only be represented by the Hebrew letters for I AM THAT I AM, in other words JHVH.*

*It follows, Charlie, that when sharing the 'Sacred Name' we have reached the very pinnacle of all Craft Freemasonry. The sharing should therefore be undertaken meaningfully, slowly and with great dignity. This shows an awareness that we have completed our Craft Journey.*

*Above all it demonstrates our respect for the Supreme Being, a Being whose nature has been revealed to us in the Holy Royal Arch and whose presence ultimately unites all Masons'.*

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