

YHWH Ro'hi (Rohi)

יהוה רעה

YHWH My Shepherd / YHWH My Friend

Pronounced **Yä-wá' Ro-hee'**, this attribute of YHWH is best known to us through the most intimate figurative language of the 23rd Psalm: "The LORD is my shepherd..."

Charles Spurgeon called it "the pearl of the psalms." Millions have memorized these few words penned by the shepherd-who-would-be-king, David. Ministers have recited them at weddings, baptisms, and funerals to offer words of comfort, peace, and hope.

This beloved psalm is so familiar to many of us that one might be tempted to give it little more than a cursory glance. **Don't!** It's important that we take time to consider all that this name reveals about YHWH and the relationship He desires to have with us.

Etymology

The word ro'hi is a transliteration of two Hebrew words:

- The word "*ra'ah*" (râ'âh) ("רָעָה") is a Hebrew root word that means to "**tend a flock**", that is, to "**pasture**" it or to "**graze**". "*Ra'ah*" is both a noun and a verb, meaning "**a** shepherd" and "**a** pasture", as well as "**to** shepherd" or "**to** pasture".
- Two other closely similar words that derive from "*ra'ah*" are "*reya*" (rêya') ("רֵיעַ")—meaning an "**associate**", as in a "brother", "friend", "neighbor", or "companion"—and "*re'uth*" (re'ûth) ("רֵעוּת"), a "**female** associate", as in a "friend" or "neighbor".

How are "*ra'ah*" and "*reya'/re'uth*" used in the Old Testament?

Both words are used throughout Scripture to represent human relationships, whether between the leaders and the people or between close friends, neighbors, and associates.

The word "*ra'ah*" appears ±170 times in the Old Testament to represent the relationships between political or religious leaders and the people, either as their shepherds or in reference to how they cared for them.

"In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD (YHWH) said to you, 'You will shepherd (*ra'ah*) my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"
(2 Samuel 5:2 *parenthetical text added*)

"who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd (*ra'ah*) and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'"
(Isaiah 44:28 *parenthetical text added*)



"Then I will give you shepherds (ra'ah) after my own heart,
who will lead (ra'ah) you with knowledge and understanding."
(Jeremiah 3:15 *parenthetical text added*)

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds (ra'ah) of Israel; prophesy
and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign (Adonai) LORD (YHWH) says:
'Woe to you shepherds (ra'ah) of Israel who only take care (ra'ah) of
yourselves! Should not shepherds (ra'ah) take care (ra'ah) of the flock?'"
(Ezekiel 34:2 *parenthetical text added*)

- ² The idols speak deceitfully, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams
that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander
like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd (ra'ah).
- ³ "My anger burns against the shepherds (ra'ah), and I will punish the
leaders; for the LORD (YHWH) Almighty will care for his flock, the people
of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle."
(Zechariah 10:2-3 *parenthetical text added*)

See *similar verses* in Genesis 4:2; Exodus 2:17-19, 34:3; Numbers 14:33; Judges 14:20; 1
Samuel 16:11, 21:7; 2 Samuel 7:7; Psalms 23:1, 28:9, 78:71-72; Proverbs 10:21;
Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 5:17, 14:30, 40:11, 49:9, 65:25; Jeremiah 2:8, 10:21, 23:1-4;
25:34-36; Ezekiel 34:2-23; Hosea 4:16; Micah 7:14; Nahum 3:18; Zephaniah 2:6,7; 3:13;
Zechariah 11:3-16; 13:7.

The word is also used figuratively with regard to believing ("feeding on") lies or foolishness.

The discerning heart seeks knowledge,
but the mouth of a fool feeds (ra'ah) on folly.
(Proverbs 15:14 *parenthetical text added*)

See *also* Isaiah 44:20; Hosea 12:1; Ezekiel 34:16.

The word "reya'/re'uth" appears ±170 times in regards to the relationships between
friends and associates.

"Come, let us go down and confuse their language
so they will not understand each other (reya')."
(Genesis 11:7 *parenthetical text added*)

The men had been seated before him in the order
of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest;
and they looked at **each other** (reya') in astonishment.
(Genesis 43:33 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man
borrow of his neighbor (reya'), and every woman of her
neighbor (re'uth), jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.
(Exodus 11:2 KJV *parenthetical text added*)

So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law
and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted
each other (reya') and then went into the tent.
(Exodus 18:7 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me,
and I decide between the **parties** (reya') and inform them
of God's (Elohim) decrees and instructions."
(Exodus 18:16 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

See *similar verses* in Exodus 20:16-17; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:20-21, 13:6, 15:2; Joshua 20:5; Judges 6:29, 7:13-22; Ruth 3:14, 4:7; 1 Samuel 10:11, 14:20, 30:26; 2 Samuel 2:16; 12:11; 13:3; 16:17; 1 Kings 8:31, 16:11; 2 Kings 3:23, 7:3,9; Esther 9:22; Job 2:11, 19:21, 42:7-10; Psalms 12:2, 101:5; Proverbs 3:28-29, 17:17-18, 29:5; Ecclesiastes 4:4; Isaiah 19:2, 41:6; Jeremiah 5:8, 29:23, 34:15-17; Ezekiel 22:11-12; Hosea 3:1; Jonah 1:7; Micah 7:5; Habakkuk 2:15; Zechariah 8:16-17; Malachi 3:16.

What is the significance of these names in regards to YHWH?

The use of both words that comprise the name "Ro'hi" indicates the intimacy YHWH desires between Himself and His people.

As our Reya', YHWH desires an intimate relationship as **friend, confidant, brother**, and the **Lover of our souls**—as in the following accounts of His relationship with Moses and the holy love between Saul's son, Jonathan, and the newly-anointed King, David.

The LORD (YHWH) would speak to Moses
face to face, as one speaks to a **friend** (reya').
(Exodus 33:11a *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side
of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times,
with his face to the ground. Then they kissed **each other** (reya')
and wept **together** (reya')--but David wept the most.
(1 Samuel 20:41 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

As our Ra'ah, YHWH desires to **lead, provide for**, and **protect** us—to be the One to whom we look to supply all our needs.

In order to fully understand the compound name, "**YHWH My Shepherd**", let's consider more closely the relationship of the shepherd to his sheep as told to us by Harriet-Louise Holland Patterson in *Around the Mediterranean with My Bible*:

"Shepherding does not change much in Palestine, where wild beasts may descend still upon unprotected sheep and suddenly destroy them. The Palestine shepherd lives night and day with his animals. He establishes a degree of intimacy with them which is touching to observe. He calls them all by their names and they, knowing his voice and hearing his only, heed. He protects the sheep from thieves and preying animals who would devour them at night, by sleeping in the opening of the often makeshift sheepfold and they, sensing his watchfulness, fear 'no evil.' He provides pasture and water even in the wilderness and the presence of enemies and they, casting all their anxiety upon him, are fed. There is a singular communion between the shepherd and his sheep which, after one has visited Palestine and observed it, makes the symbol of the good Shepherd peculiarly apt and the Twenty-third Psalm strangely moving."¹



YHWH doesn't want mentally- and emotionally-detached children simply going through repetitious religious exercises. He wants a **close personal** involvement in every aspect of our lives.

"But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber,
because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob,
because of the **Shepherd** (Ra'ah), the Rock of Israel,"
(Genesis 49:24 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

- 4 He will stand and shepherd (ra'ah) his flock in the strength of the LORD (YHWH), in the majesty of the name of the LORD (YHWH) his God (Elohim). And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.
- 5 And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds (ra'ah), even eight commanders,
(Micah 5:4-5 *parenthetical text added*)

Taking all of the above into consideration, we may conclude that the name "Ro'hi" symbolizes "**associating with**", "**taking pleasure in**", "**caring for**", and "**cherishing**".

Combined with the name "YHWH", the above relationships find their most affectionate and exalted verbal expression: YHWH, **our** Shepherd . . . YHWH, **your** Shepherd . . . YHWH, **my** Shepherd!

- 1 Hear us, Shepherd (Ro'hi) of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth
- 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.
- 3 Restore us, O God (Elohim); make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

(Psalm 80:1 *parenthetical text added*)

- 10 See, the Sovereign (Adonai) LORD (YHWH) comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.
- 11 He tends (ro'hi) his flock like a shepherd (ro'hi): He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

(Isaiah 40:10-11 *parenthetical text added*)

- 11 For this is what the Sovereign (Adonai) LORD (YHWH) says: I myself will **search** for my sheep and look after them.
- 12 As a shepherd (ro'hi) looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will **rescue** them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.
- 13 I will **bring** them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will **bring** them into their own land. I will **pasture** (ro'hi) them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.
- 14 I will tend (ro'hi) them in a **good pasture**, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in **good grazing land**, and there they will feed (ro'hi) in a **rich pasture** on the mountains of Israel.



- 15 I myself will tend (ro'hi) my sheep and have them **lie down**, declares the Sovereign (Adonai) LORD (YHWH).
- 16 I will **search** for the lost and **bring back** the strays. I will **bind up** the injured and **strengthen** the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will **shepherd** (ro'hi) the flock with justice.
(Ezekiel 34:11-16 *parenthetical text added*)

Notice the language in that prophetic promise: He will "**search** for the lost" . . . "**bring back** the strays" . . . "**bind up** the injured" . . . and "**strengthen** the weak." No other revealed name of GOD denotes such caring intimacy as the name YHWH Rohi! As Nathan Stone wrote in *Names of God*:

"Everything that the shepherd is to the sheep, Jehovah is to His people. If there can exist such a tender intimacy between a man and sheep, how much more so between Jehovah and the spirits He has created and redeemed; and what a marvelous thing that God should offer Himself for such a relationship. He had said, 'I will dwell among the children of Israel' (Exodus 29:45), and the word dwell is the word Shekinah, denoting His glorious presence. Jehovah as Shepherd offers His people the intimacy of His presence. He may be as intimately known as the shepherd is of the sheep. . . . The intimacy of the shepherd is the most precious privilege and possession of the sheep, and this the Lord's people, as His sheep, should cultivate and enjoy. But it comes only by long and constant association and abiding in His presence."²

Referring back to Psalm 23, YHWH Rohi isn't only the Shepherd of His people, He is **my** Shepherd. As sheep of His fold, you and I can rest in the sure knowledge that we are precious to Him and that our GOD cares about every one of our needs. We need not fear, nor doubt, nor wonder. YHWH is **my** Shepherd . . . YHWH is **your** Shepherd . . . Oh, praise His most holy name!

Our Ro'hi desires to have the kind of intimate relationship with us that the shepherd has with his sheep—one by which He calls each of us by name.

Meditation

"The LORD is my shepherd..." Stop for a moment and meditate on those words. The whole of the 23rd Psalm stands on this single phrase.

"The **LORD**..."—YHWH . . . Jehovah . . . Yahweh . . . Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh . . . the Self-Existent, eternal, Almighty, Most High God—is a declaration of **GOD's role**.

"...is **my**..." Martin Luther said that "*faith is a matter of personal pronouns.*" We must personalize and internalize the truth of this statement. It is a declaration of **our role** in the relationship.

"...**shepherd**." This is a declaration of GOD's **responsibility**. YHWH condescended to calling Himself the Shepherd of His people. As such, it is **His** responsibility to...

- lead us to **good pasture**.



Jesus, the 'good shepherd', said: "...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?'...your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you..." (Matthew 6:31-33)

- keep us **safe** in the pasture.

One way in which the shepherd protects the sheep is to lead them to a pasture with a natural boundary on three sides and then lie down in the entrance-way to the pasture, making himself like a door. In that way, no one can get to the sheep without waking the shepherd. And the shepherd will fight to the death to protect his sheep. That's why Jesus said: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved." (John 10:9)

- seek out and bring back any who have strayed.

The shepherd knows where to find the best pasture, most refreshing springs, shade in the scorching heat, or warm and dry shelter in the midst of brutal storms. He also knows where the dangerous cliffs or fissures or thickets are, and he is able to protect the sheep from voracious animals that would devour them. Because he has a vested interest in the sheep—they are **his** sheep—he seeks after and brings back any that have strayed from the safety of the fold. That's why Jesus said quite simply: "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

As a flock, we have only to indulge a most nutritive and excellent pasture, sleep peacefully in comfort and safety, and trust His grace and providence to lead us in the way in which we should go.

Who belongs to this "flock"? The "flock" would be you. It would be me. It would be anyone and everyone who was lost . . . who has heard His voice and has turned to follow. Does that mean we will never stumble, never fail, never sin again, never again lie or get angry or resent or envy or do any of the myriad other things consequent to our fallenness that grieve the Holy Spirit?

Sadly, no. But, what a precious promise we have from the LORD who is **our** "good shepherd", who "came to seek and save" us—first to bring us into the fold, and then to bring us back when we stray!

"The LORD is **my** shepherd..."

"The LORD is **your** shepherd..."

"The LORD is **our** shepherd..."

¹ Patterson, *Around the Mediterranean with My Bible*, pp. 142, 143.

² Stone, Nathan, *Names of God*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1944, 2010. p. 170.

