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The Armenian Name of the Lord



Altar of the Armenian Church of the Forty Martyrs, Aleppo

SAY: Raise your hand if you know any letters in the Armenian alphabet. (Pause) Who can tell me the 7th letter of the Armenian alphabet? Let's try saying the alphabet together and count the letters as we go. Ready? (As you say the letters of the alphabet (below) together with the children, count them by holding up your fingers.) "Ayp, pen, keem tah, yech, za, **EH!**" The 7th letter is "Eh!" (Write this letter on the board/chart paper) Է

SAY: "Eh" is a very special letter in the Armenian alphabet. Who can tell me the name of the man who created the Armenian alphabet? (Pause) Yes, it was Mesrob Mashtots! And when he created the Armenian Alphabet in 405 A.D., he specifically put the letter "eh" as the 7th letter of the alphabet because the 7th position is considered to be a sacred place. Symbolically, 7 is known as the number of **perfection**, or **completion**. Throughout the Bible, the number 7 is attributed to several acts of God, (7 days of creation, Jesus performed 7 miracles of God, etc.) and to **God Himself**, so for the Armenian Church, the letter 'Eh,' its place in the alphabet, and its meaning are considered to be Holy.

SAY: Have you ever noticed the letter "Eh" above our church altar? (Pause) If you walk into any given Armenian Orthodox Church, you will most likely see the single letter 'Eh' either directly at the top of the altar, such as the picture above demonstrates, or you may see the words 'Asdvadz Ser **Eh**' (in Armenian letters) with the English translation 'God Is Love' following it. (In the case of the latter, the letter 'Eh' is still directly above the altar.)

What is so special about the letter 'Eh' that it deserves such a prominent place over the church altar? There are several explanations: (Depending on the age of your audience, consider which and how many of the below to share. **But ALWAYS end with a demonstration of #6!**)

1. **The Meaning of "Eh:"** In the phrase 'God is Love', the word for **is** is 'eh', thus, 'Asdvadz Ser Eh' (translation: 'God Is Love'). So, the letter/word 'Eh' literally means 'is' or 'He is', which, to those familiar with the Old Testament, may sound like a reference to God Himself.

2. **Biblical Reference:** In Exodus chapter 3, the prophet Moses encountered God in the burning bush. As God

was instructing Moses to deliver His people from Egypt, Moses asked, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.' God told Moses that His name is 'I am', or technically 'Is', or 'He Who Is'. Thus, God is a being who just IS, and it is only the eternal God who can call Himself by this name. In Armenian, it is the letter/word 'Eh' that serves as the name for 'I am' or 'he is', and just as Moses realized the 'Eh' to be dwelling in the burning bush, so too does the Armenian Church realize that God (Eh) dwells at the church altar.



Sign on a marble Khatchkar (Cross Stone) in the Holy Etchmiadzin.

3. **Pronunciation:** "Eh", when pronounced, makes the sound of a breath, and so the idea of God being the breath of life is attached to this letter.

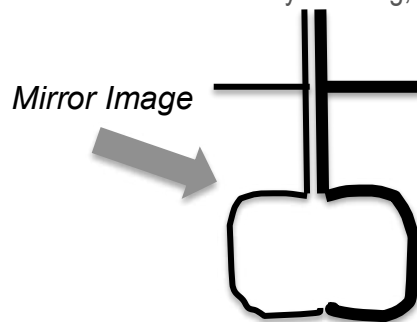
4. **Alphabet Placement:** The letter 'Eh' happens to be the 7th letter of the Armenian alphabet. Symbolically, 7 is known as the number of perfection, or completion. Throughout the Bible, the number 7 is attributed to several acts of God, and to God Himself, so the letter 'Eh' takes on even further significance. Thus, for the Armenian Church, the letter 'Eh' and its meaning are considered to be holy. It is not only symbolic, but 'Eh' is the name of God.

5. **Linguistic:** Another interesting fact; in the Armenian alphabet, only the letter (Ē) can be added as a prefix or a suffix and form a new word. There is no other letter that can be applied in such manner according to the rules of Armenian grammar. Therefore, (Ē), is not only a simple letter or a character, but is also a Word in and of itself.

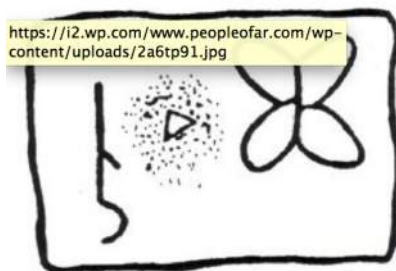
6. **Historical:** The earliest attestation of the sign has been found on petroglyphs in Metsamor, Armenia and has been dated to 3,000 BCE. The sign itself was known for its use by Mithraic priests in pre-Christian, Armenia. Later, it was adopted by the Armenian Church, and to date, it can be admired on top of the altars of Armenian Churches.

* 7. **Mirror Image of Է:** At the front of your classroom, write a large Է

SAY/DEMONSTRATE: When the mirror image (backwards) of Է is placed next to it, a picture image of a "Cross on top of a ball" (see image below) is created; the ball representing the world and the cross representing Christ and that Christ died for the sins of the world. Pretty amazing, right?!



More Pictures:



Sketch of the Armenian letter (Ē)



Armenian letter Է (Ē) found in Metsamor (3,000 BCE)