

# THOUGHT OF NACHMANIDES: VAYEIRA: REVELATION TO ABRAHAM

Gavriel Z. Bellino – October 28, 2015

## Nachmanides on Genesis 18:1

AND HE APPEARED TO HIM. Rashi comments: "To visit the sick man. Said Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina, 'It was the third day after his circumcision, and the Holy One, blessed be He, came and inquired after him.'" And, to, three men: angels who came to him in the form of men. Three: one to announce to Sarah that she would bear a son, one to heal Abraham, and one to overthrow Sodom. Raphael who healed Abraham went from there to rescue Lot." For these do not constitute two commissions. This is because the second mission was in another place, and he was commanded thereon after [he had completed his first mission] . Perhaps it is because the two missions had rescue as their common goal. "And they did eat: they appeared to be eating."

In the book Guide of the Perplexed it is said that this portion of Scripture consists of a general statement followed by a detailed description. Thus Scripture first says that the Eternal appeared to Abraham in the form of prophetic visions, and then explains in what manner this vision took place, namely, that he [Abraham] lifted up his eyes in the vision, and lo, three men stood by him, and he said, if now I have found favor in thy eyes. This is the account of what he said in the prophetic vision to one of them, namely, their chief.

## פרוש הרמב"ן על ספר בראשית יח:

(א) וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו. לשון רש"י, לבקר את החולה, אמר רבי חמא בר חנינא יום שלישי למילתו היה ובא הקדוש ברוך הוא ושאל בו. והנה שלשה אנשים, המלאכים שבאו אליו בדמות אנשים. שלשה, אחד לבשר את שרה ואחד לרפאות את אברהם ואחד להפוך את סדום, ורפאל שרפא את אברהם הלך משם להציל את לוט, שאין זה שתי שליחות, כי היה במקום אחר ונצטוו בו אחר כן, או ששתייהן להצלה. ויאכלו, נראו כמי שאכלו:

ובספר מורה הנבוכים (ב' מ"ב) נאמר כי הפרשה כלל ופרט. אמר הכתוב תחלה כי נראה אליו השם במראות הנבואה, ואין היתה המראה הזאת, כי נשא עיניו במראה והנה ג' אנשים נצבים עליו. ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך, זה ספור מה שאמר במראה הנבואה לאחד מהם הגדול שבהם.

	<u>Rashi</u>	<u>Rambam</u>
And He appeared:	God's Presence (Visit)	Vision of God (Prophecy)
Three men:	Real Angels	Imaginal Men
Eating:	In Appearance	Real (but imaginal, not actual)

Now if in the vision there appeared to Abraham only men partaking of food, how then does Scripture say, And the Eternal appeared to him, as G d did not appear to him in vision or in thought? Such is not found with respect to all the prophecies. And according to his words, Sarah did not knead cakes, nor did Abraham prepare a bullock, and also, Sarah did not laugh. It was all a vision! If so, this dream came through a multitude of business," like dreams of falsehood, for what is the purpose of showing him all this!

Similarly did he (Rambam) say in the case of the verse, "And a man wrestled with him," that it was all a prophetic vision? But if this be the case, I do not know why Jacob limped on his thigh when he awoke! And why did Jacob say, "For I have seen an angel face to face, and my life is preserved." The prophets did not fear that they might die on account of having experienced prophetic visions. Jacob, moreover, had already seen a greater and more distinguished vision than this since many times, in prophetic visions, he had also seen the Revered Divinity.

Now according to this author's opinion (Maimonides), he will find it necessary for the sake of consistency to say similarly in the affair of Lot that the angels did not come to his house, nor did he bake for them unleavened bread and they did eat. Rather, it was all a vision! But if Lot could ascend to the height of a prophetic vision, how did the wicked and sinful people of Sodom become prophets? Who told them that men had come into Lot's house?

ואם במראה, לא נראו אליו רק אנשים אוכלים בשר, איך אמר וירא אליו ה', כי הנה לא נראה לו השם לא במראה ולא במחשבה, וככה לא נמצא בכל הנבואות, והנה לדבריו לא לשה שרה עגות, ולא עשה אברהם בן בקר, וגם לא צחקה שרה, רק הכל מראה, ואם כן בא החלום הזה ברוב ענין פחלומות השקר, כי מה תועלת להראות לו כל זה:

ובן אמר (שם) בענין "ויאבק איש עמו" (להלן ל"ב כ"ה) שהכל מראה הנבואה. ולא ידעתי למה היה צולע על ירכו בהקיץ, ולמה אמר (להלן ל"ב ל"א) כי ראיתי אלהים פנים אל פנים ותנצל נפשי, כי הנביאים לא יפחדו שימותו מפני מראות הנבואה. וכבר ראה מראה גדולה ונכבדת מזאת, כי גם את השם הנכבד ראה פעמים רבות במראה הנבואה (עין להלן כ"ח י"ג, ל"א ג'):

והנה לפי דעתו זאת. יצטרף לומר כן בענין לוט, כי לא באו המלאכים אל ביתו, ולא אפה להם מצות ויאכלו, אבל הכל היה מראה. ואם יעלה את לוט למעלת מראה הנבואה איך יהיו אנשי סדום הרעים והחטאים נביאים, כי מי הגיד להם שבאו אנשים אל ביתו.

And if all these [i.e., the actions of the inhabitants of Sodom], were part of prophetic visions, then it follows that the account related in the verses, And the angels hastened Lot, saying: Arise take thy wife. ...And he said, Escape for thy life... See, I have accepted thee, as well as the entire chapter is but a vision, and if so, Lot could have remained in Sodom! But he thinks that the events took place of themselves, but the conversations relating to all matters were in a vision! But such words contradict Scripture. It is forbidden to listen to them, all the more to believe in them!

ואם  
הכל מראות נבואתו של לוט, יהיה  
”ויאצו המלאכים, קום קח את אשתך”,  
”ויאמר המלט על נפשך” (להלן י”ט ט”ו.  
י”ז), ו”הנה נשאתי פניך, (שם פסוק כ”א),  
וכל הפרשה כלה מראה, וישאר לוט  
בסדום. אבל יחשב שהיו המעשים נעשים  
מאליהם, והמאמרים בכל דבר ודבר  
מראה, ואלה דברים סותרים הכתוב, אסור  
לשמעם אף כי להאמין בהם:

In truth, wherever Scripture mentions an angel being seen or heard speaking it is in a vision or in a dream for the human senses cannot perceive the angels. But these are not visions of prophecy since he who attains the vision of an angel or the hearing of his speech is not yet a prophet. For the matter is not as the Rabbi pronounced, i.e., that every prophet, Moses our teacher excepted, received his prophecy through the medium of an angel.

ובאמת כי כל מקום שהזכר בכתוב  
ראית מלאך או דבור מלאך  
הוא במראה או בחלום, כי ההרגשים לא  
ישיגו המלאכים, אבל לא מראות הנבואה,  
כי המשיג לראות מלאך או דבורו איננו  
נביא, שאין הדבר כמו שהרב גזר (במור”ג  
ב’ ל”ג, ובהלכות יסוה”ת ז’ ו’) כי כל נביא  
זולת משה רבנו נבואתו על ידי מלאך.

[SKIPPING]

- “Seeing” Angels and “hearing” God are not physical sensations.
  - RAMBAM: This person who perceives Angels is a prophet.
  - RAMBAN: This does not mean that everyone who perceives angels is a prophet.
    - Daniel is not a prophet (ala Midrash), but he was able to perceive the angel Gabriel. (And the vision of the final redemption is not prophetic because he was awake!)
    - Hagar perceived an angel, but is not regarded as a prophetess. (Rambam would say that she heard a bat-kol.)
- Moses was the greatest prophet of all time.
  - RAMBAM: Moses received communication directly from God. Every other prophet received communication from angels

RAMBAN: All prophets can receive direct communication from God or from an angel. One of the powers of prophecy is to discern that the angel’s words are the Word of God.

In the beginning of Vayikra Rabbah the Sages have said: "And He called to Moses, unlike Abraham. Concerning Abraham it is written, *And the angel of the Eternal called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven*. The angel called, and God spoke the word, but here with respect to Moses, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'It is I Who called, and it is I Who spoke the word.' " That is to say, Abraham did not attain prophecy until he prepared his soul first to perceive an angel, and from that degree he ascended to attain the word of prophecy, but Moses was prepared for prophecy at all times.

Thus the Sages were prompted to inform us everywhere that seeing an angel is not prophecy, and those who see angels and speak with them are not included among the prophets, as I have mentioned concerning Daniel. Rather, this is only a vision called "opening of eyes," as in the verse: "And the Eternal opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Eternal;" similarly: "And Elisha prayed, and said, O Eternal, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see." But where Scripture mentions the angels as men, as is the case in this portion, and the portion concerning Lot - likewise, "And a man wrestled with him," "And a certain man found him," in the opinion of our Rabbis in all these cases there was a special glory created in the angels, called among those who know the mysteries of the Torah "a garment," perceptible to the human vision of such pure persons as the pious and the disciples of the prophets, and I cannot explain any further. And in those places in Scripture where you find the sight of God and the speech of an angel, or the sight of an angel and the speech of God, as is written concerning Moses at the outset of his prophecy, and in the words of Zechariah, I will yet disclose words of the living God in allusions. Concerning on the matter of the verse, "And they did eat," the Sages have said: "One Course after the other disappeared. The matter of "disappearance" you will understand from the account about Manoah if you will be worthy to attain it.

וּבְתַחֲלָת וַיִּקְרָא רַבָּה (א' ט') אָמְרוּ  
וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה, לֹא  
פֶּאֶבְרָהֶם, פֶּאֶבְרָהֶם כְּתוּב וַיִּקְרָא מִלֶּאֱדָה ה'  
אֶל אֲבִרָהֶם שְׁנִית מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם (לְהֵלֵן כ"ב  
ט"ו), הַמִּלֶּאֱדָה קוֹרָא וְהַדְּבוּר מְדַבֵּר, בְּרֵם  
הֵכָא אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֲנִי הוּא  
הַקּוֹרָא וְאֲנִי הוּא הַמְּדַבֵּר. כְּלוּמַר שֶׁלֹּא  
הָיָה אֲבִרָהֶם מְשִׁיג הַנְּבוּאָה עַד הִכְיִנוּ  
נַפְשׁוֹ בְּתַחֲלָתָהּ לְהַשְׁגַּת מִלֶּאֱדָה, וַיַּעֲלֶה מִן  
הַמְּדֻרְגָּה הַהִיא לְמַעַלְתָּ דְּבוּר הַנְּבוּאָה,  
אֲבָל מֹשֶׁה מוּכָן לְנְבוּאָה בְּכָל עֵת:

הַגָּה בְּכָל מְקוֹם יִתְעוֹרְרוּ הַחֲכָמִים  
לְהוֹדִיעֵנוּ כִּי רֵאִית הַמִּלֶּאֱדָה אֵינֶנָּה  
נְבוּאָה וְאֵין הָרוּאִים מִלֶּאֱדָה וְהַמְּדַבְּרִים  
עִמָּם מְכַלֵּל הַנְּבִיאִים כְּאֲשֶׁר הִזְכַּרְתִּי  
בְּדִנְיָאֵל, אֲבָל הִיא מְרֹאָה, תִּקְרָא "גְּלוּי  
עֵינִים", כְּמוֹ וַיִּגַּל ה' אֶת עֵינָי בַּלָּעַם וַיִּרְא  
אֶת מִלֶּאֱדָה ה' (בַּמְּדַבֵּר כ"ב ל"א), וְכֵן וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל  
אֱלִישָׁע וַיֹּאמֶר ה' פָּקַח נָא אֶת עֵינָיו וַיִּרְאָהּ  
(מ"ב ו' י"ז). אֲבָל בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִזְכִּיר  
הַמִּלֶּאֱדָה בְּשֵׁם אֲנָשִׁים כְּעִנֵּין הַפֶּרֶשָׁה  
הַזֹּאת וּפְרָשַׁת לוֹט, וְכֵן וַיֹּאבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ  
(לְהֵלֵן ל"ב כ"ה), וְכֵן וַיִּמְצָאֵהוּ אִישׁ (שם ל"ז  
ט"ו), עַל דַּעַת רְבוּתֵינּוּ (ב"ר ע"ז ב', תְּנַחֲמָא  
וַיֵּשֶׁב ב') הוּא כְבוֹד נִבְרָא בְּמִלֶּאֱדָה, יִקְרָא  
אֲצֵל הַיּוֹדְעִים "מִלְּבוּשׁ", יִשָּׁג לְעֵינָי כְּאֲשֶׁר  
בְּזַפִּי הַנִּפְשׁוֹת כְּחִסְדֵּי וְכִנֵּי הַנְּבִיאִים.  
וְלֹא אוֹכַל לְפָרֶשׁ. וְהַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא  
בּוֹ רֵאִית ה' וְדְבוּר מִלֶּאֱדָה, אוֹ רֵאִית  
מִלֶּאֱדָה וְדְבוּר ה', כְּכָתוּב בְּדִבְרֵי מֹשֶׁה  
בְּתַחֲלָת נְבוּאָתוֹ (שְׁמוֹת ג' ב"ד), וּבְדִבְרֵי  
זְכַרְיָה (ג' א"ב), עוֹד אֲגַלֶּה בּוֹ דְּבָרִי  
אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים בְּרִמְיּוֹת (עַן שְׁמוֹת ג' ב').  
וְעִנֵּין וַיֹּאכְלוּ, אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים (ב"ר מ"ח י"ד)  
רֹאשׁוֹן רֹאשׁוֹן מִסְתַּלֵּק. וְעִנֵּין הַהִסְתַּלְּקוֹת  
תְּבִין אוֹתוֹ מְדַבֵּר מְנוּחַ אִם תִּזְכֶּה אֵלָיו.

Now here is the interpretation of this portion of Scripture. After it says that In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised Scripture says that God appeared to him while he was sick from the circumcision as he was sitting and cooling himself in his tent door on account of the heat of the day which weakened him. Scripture mentions this in order to inform us that Abraham had no intention for prophecy. He had neither fallen on his face nor prayed, yet this vision did come to him.

IN THE OAKS OF MAMRE. This is to inform us of the place wherein he was circumcised. Now this revelation of the Shekhina (the Divine Presence) came to Abraham as a mark of distinction and honor, even as it is said in connection with the dedication of the Tabernacle, And they, [Moses and Aaron] came out, and blessed the people, and the glory, of the Eternal appeared unto all the people, as it was on account of their effort in fulfilling the commandment of building the Tabernacle that they merited seeing the Shekhina. Now the revelation of the Shekhina here and there was not at all for the purpose of charging them with some commandment or to impart some communication. Instead, it was a reward for the commandment which had already been performed, and it informed them that their deeds have God's approval, even as it says, As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Thy likeness.

וְהִנֵּה פְרוּשׁ הַפְּרָשָׁה הַזֹּאת, אַחֲרֵי שֶׁאָמַר  
כִּי בַעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִמּוֹל אֲבֹרָהֶם  
(לְעִיל י"ז כ"ו), אָמַר שֶׁנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו הָאֵל  
בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ חוֹלָה בְּמִילָתוֹ, יוֹשֵׁב וּמִתְקַרֵּר  
בְּפֶתַח אֹהֶלוֹ מִפְּנֵי חֶם הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִחְלִישֶׁנוּ,  
וְהַזְכִּיר זֶה לְהוֹדִיעַ שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה מִתְכוּן  
לְנִבְיאוּת לֹא נוֹפֵל עַל פָּנָיו וְלֹא מִתְפַּלֵּל, וְאִם  
עַל פִּי כֵן בָּאָה אֵלָיו הַמִּרְאָה הַזֹּאת:

בְּאַלְגֵּי מַמְרֵא. לְהוֹדִיעַ הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ  
נִמּוֹל. וְזֶה גִלּוּי הַשְּׂכִינָה אֵלָיו  
לְמַעַל וְכְבוֹד לוֹ, כְּעִנְיָן שֶׁבָּא בְּמִשְׁכַּן  
וַיֵּצְאוּ וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת הָעָם וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד ה' אֶל  
כָּל הָעָם (וַיִּקְרָא ט' כ"ג), כִּי מִפְּנֵי  
הַשְׁתַּדְּלוּתָם בְּמִצְוֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן זָכוּ לִרְאִית  
הַשְּׂכִינָה. וְאֵין גִּלּוּי הַשְּׂכִינָה כָּאֵן וְכָאֵן  
לְצִוּוֹת לָהֶם מִצְוָה אוֹ לְדַבּוּר כָּלֵל, אֲלֹא  
גָּמוּל הַמִּצְוָה הַנַּעֲשִׂית כְּכֹר, וְלְהוֹדִיעַ כִּי  
רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, כְּעִנְיָן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר  
(תְּהִלִּים י"ז ט"ו) אֲנִי בְצֹדֵק אֲחִיזָה פְּנִידָה  
אֲשַׁבְּעָה בְּהַקִּיץ תְּמוּנָתְךָ.

Similarly, in connection with Jacob, Scripture says, And the angels of God met him, and yet we find no communication there, nor is any new matter conveyed. Instead, the verse only informs us that he merited seeing angels of the Supreme One, and thus he knew that his deeds had His approval. And so it was with Abraham: the seeing of the Shekhina (the Divine Presence) was both merit for his having performed the commandment of circumcision and assurance of God's approval. Similarly did the Sages say of those who passed through the Red Sea and said, This is my God, and I will glorify Him: A handmaid saw at the sea what Ezekiel the prophet never saw." This they merited at the time of the great miracle because they believed in the Eternal, and in Moses his servant. At times the appearance of the Shekhina comes in a moment of anger, as mentioned in the verse: And the whole congregation bade stone them with stones, when the glory of the Eternal appeared in the tent of meeting unto all the children of Israel. That was for the protection of His righteous servants and their honor.

Now do not be concerned about the interruption of the portion since the subject is after all connected. It is for this reason that the verse says, "And I appeared to him", and it does not say "And the Eternal appeared to Abraham." But in this present chapter Scripture Wishes to give an account of the honor that was bestowed upon Abraham at the time he performed the circumcision, and it tells, that the Shekhina appeared to him and sent him His angels to inform his wife she would give birth to a son, and also to save his relative Lot on his account. Abraham had already been informed by the Shekhina concerning the birth of a son, and Sarah was now informed by word of the angel who spoke with Abraham in order that Sarah should hear, even as it says, And Sarah heard. This is the intent of the Sages' saying, "God came to visit the sick man," meaning that it was not for the purpose of some Utterance but as a mark of honor to him. They have also said, And the altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me. Now if any person just built an altar to My name, he is assured that I will appear unto him and bless him. All the more is such assurance given to Abraham who circumcised himself for My name." It is possible that the Sages may have further intended to say by their remark, "He came to visit the sick man," that the vision of the Shekhinah was a cure for his sickness on account of the circumcision, for so it should be, as it is written, In the light of the King's countenance is life.

וְכֵן בִּיעָקֵב אָמַר (לְהֵלֵךְ לִ"ב ב') וַיִּפְגְּעוּ בּוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים, וְאֵין שָׁם דְּבוּר וְלֹא שְׁחַדְשׁוּ בּוֹ דְּבַר, רַק שְׂזָכָה לְרֵאִיתָ מַלְאֲכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן, וַיֵּדַע כִּי מַעֲשָׂיו רְצוּיִים. וְכֵן הָיָה לְאַבְרָהָם בְּרֵאִיתָ הַשְׂכִּינָה זְכוּת וְהַבְטָחָה. וְכֵן אָמְרוּ (מְכִילֵתָא שִׁירְתָא ג') בְּיֹרְדֵי הַיָּם, שְׁאָמְרוּ "זֶה אֵלֵינוּ וְאֵנִיחוּ" רֵאִיתָה שְׁפָחָה עַל הַיָּם מָה שְׁלֹא רָאָה יְחִזְקֵאל הַנְּבִיא, זְכוּת לְהֵם בְּעֵת הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁהָאֲמִינוּ בָּהּ וּבְמִשָּׁה עֲבָדוֹ. וּפְעָמִים יָבֹא בְשַׁעַת הַקָּצֵף וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הָעֵדָה לְרָגוֹם אֹתָם בְּאַבְנִים וּכְבוֹד ה' נִרְאָה בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד אֵל כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (בְּמִדְבָּר י"ד י'), וַיְהִיָּה זֶה לְהִגָּן עַל עֲבָדָיו הַצְדִּיקִים וְלְכַבּוֹדָם.

וְאֵל תַּחוּשׁ לְהַפְסֵק הַפְּרָשָׁה, כִּי הָעֲנִין מִחֲבֵר, וְלִכֵּן אָמַר וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וְלֹא אָמַר "וַיֵּרָא ה' אֵל אַבְרָהָם". אֲכַל בְּפִרְשָׁה רָצָה לְסַדֵּר כְּבוֹד הַנִּעְשָׂה לוֹ בְּעֵת שְׁעָשָׂה הַמִּילָה, וְאָמַר כִּי נִגְלִיתָ אֵלָיו הַשְׂכִּינָה וְשָׁלַח אֵלָיו מַלְאָכָיו לְבַשֵּׁר אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְגַם לְהַצִּיל לוֹט אָחִיו בְּעִבּוּרוֹ, כִּי אַבְרָהָם נִתְבַּשֵּׁר בְּבֶן מִפִּי הַשְׂכִּינָה כָּבֵד, וְשָׁרָה מִפִּי הַמִּלָּאָה שֶׁדִּבְרָה עִם אַבְרָהָם כְּדִי שֶׁתִּשְׁמַע שָׂרָה, כִּמּוֹ שְׁאָמַר וְשָׂרָה שָׁמְעָתָה. וְזוֹ כְּוִנָּתָם שְׁאָמְרוּ (סוֹטָה י"ד) לְבַקֵּר אֶת הַחֹלָה, שְׁלֹא הָיָה לְדַבּוּר אֲלֵא לְכַבּוֹד לוֹ. וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ (ב"ר מ"ח ד') מִזְבֵּחַ אֲדָמָה תַּעֲשֶׂה לִּי. וְכֵּן אִם זֶה שְׂכָנָה מִזְבֵּחַ לְשָׁמִי הָרִינִי נִגְלָה עֲלָיו וּמִבְּרָכּוֹ, אַבְרָהָם שָׁמַל עֲצָמוֹ לְשָׁמִי עַל אַחַת כְּמָה וְכְמָה. וְשָׁמָּה כְּוִנּוּ עוֹד בְּזֶה לֵאמֹר שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ בְּמִרְאָה הַשְׂכִּינָה רְפוּי לְמַחֲלַת הַמִּילָה, כִּי כֵן רָאוּי לְהִיּוֹת כְּדִכְתִּיב (מְשִׁלִּי ט"ז ט"ו) בְּאוֹר פָּנָי מִלֶּךָ חַיִּים:

	Rashi	Rambam	Ramban
And He appeared:	God's Presence (Visit)	Vision of God (Prophecy)	God's Presence (Not for prophecy but to honor and/or to heal)
Three men:	Real Angels	Imaginal Men	Real Angels (but "vested" as men)
Eating:	In Appearance	Real (within the imagined state)	In Appearance (the food disappeared)