

THOUGHT OF NACHMANIDES: VAYECHI: WHAT'S IN GOD'S NAME?

Gavriel Z. Bellino – January 6, 2016

Exodus 6

ספר שמות ו

(2) And Elohim spoke unto Moses, and said unto him: 'I am YHWH; (3) and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, b'El Shadai, and My name YHWH, I was not known to them. (4) And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned. (5) And moreover I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant.

(ב) וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה; וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, אֲנִי יְהוָה. (ג) וָאֵרָא, אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אֶל-יִצְחָק וְאֶל-יַעֲקֹב--בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי; וְשְׁמִי יְהוָה, לֹא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם. (ד) וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם, לָתֵת לָהֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן--אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם, אֲשֶׁר-גָּרוּ בָּהּ. (ה) וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי, אֶת-נִאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם, מַעֲבִדִּים אֹתָם; וְאָזְכֹּר, אֶת-בְּרִיתִי.

Nachmanides on Exodus 6:2-5

פרוש הרמב"ן על ספר שמות ו:ב-ה

AND GOD SPOKE UNTO MOSES. Rashi explains that He spoke to him harshly because he had been critical when he said, Why have you done evil unto this nation? AND HE SAID UNTO HIM: I AM YHWH, Who is faithful to recompense reward to those who walk before Me wholeheartedly. In this sense we find the phrase explained in many places, etc. AND I APPEARED UNTO ABRAHAM, etc., BY THE NAME EL SHADAI, I made many promises to him, and in all cases I said to him, I am EL SHADAI. BUT BY MY NAME, YHWH, WAS I NOT KNOWN UNTO THEM. It was not written here, "I did not make known to them" rather, it is written, [But by My Name, YHWH], was I not known unto them, meaning: "I was not recognized by them in My attribute of keeping faith, by reason of which My Name is called YHWH, which denotes that I am certain to fulfill the words [of My promise]. Indeed I made promises to the patriarchs but did not fulfill them [during their lifetime]." All these are the words of the Rabbi.

(ב-ה) וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה. לְשׁוֹן רַשִׁי: "דִּבֶּר אֹתוֹ מִשְׁפָּט" עַל שֶׁהִקְשָׁה לוֹמַר וַיְדַבֵּר לְמַעַן הִרְעֵתָה לְעַם הַזֶּה (לְעֵיל ה', כ"ב.). וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי ה', נֶאֱמַן לְשֵׁלֶם שְׂכָר לַמַּתְהִלִּים לְפָנַי בְּתַמִּים. וּבְלִשׁוֹן הַזֶּה מְצִינוּ שֶׁהוּא נִדְרָשׁ בְּכַמָּה מְקוֹמוֹת וְכו'. וָאֵרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם וְגו' בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי, הִבְטַחְתִּי הַרְבֵּה הִבְטַחֹת, וּבְכָלֵן אֶמְרָתִי לָהֶם אֲנִי אֵל שַׁדַּי. וְשְׁמִי ה' לֹא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם, "לֹא הִוָּדַעְתִּי אֵין כְּתִיב כָּאֵין" אֲלֵא לֹא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם שֶׁלֹּא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם בְּמַדָּה אֱמִתִּית שְׁלִי שֶׁעָלֶיהָ נִקְרָא "שְׁמִי ה'", נֶאֱמַן לְאֵמֶת הַדְּבָרִים, שֶׁהָרִי הִבְטַחְתִּים וְלֹא קִיַּמְתִּים. כֹּל אֱלוֹ הַדְּבָרִי הַרְבֵּה.

His intent is to explain that the fulfillment of His promise [to the patriarchs] had not taken place. Even though the time for the fulfillment had not arrived, yet He was not known to the patriarchs in the fulfillment of His promise. But with all this interpretation, Rashi has not properly explained the language of the text. [According to his interpretation] it should be said, to hodati “and My Name, the YHWH, 'I did not make known' to them,” instead of lo nodati (was not made known). Or it should have said, “and My Name, YHWH, lo noda (was not known) to them.” Perhaps according to Rashi's opinion, the sense of the verse is: “and My Name is YHWH, ulo nodati lahem,” meaning that “I was not made known to them by that Name.”

And the wise Rabbi Abraham explained that the letter beth of the words b'El Shadai connected with the ensuing words ush'mi YHWH, [making it ubishmi YHWH], which has the following meaning: “And I appeared unto Abraham, etc., by the Name El Shadai, but by My Name YHWH I was not made known unto them.” The purport of the verse is that He appeared to the patriarchs by this Name El Shadai which indicates that He is the victor over the hosts of heaven, doing great miracles for them except that no change from the natural order of the world was noticeable. In famine, He redeemed them from death, and in war from the power of the sword, and He gave them riches and honor and all the goodness, just like all the assurances mentioned in the Torah concerning blessings and curses. It is not natural that man should be rewarded for performance of a commandment or punished for committing a transgression, but by a miracle. If man were left to his lure or his fortune, his deeds would neither add to him nor diminish from him. Rather, reward and punishment in this world, as mentioned in the entire scope of the Torah, are miracles, but they are hidden. They appear to the onlooker as being but of the natural order of things, but in truth they come upon man as punishment and reward.

וַיִּרְצֵה לְפָרֵשׁ שְׁעָדִין לֹא נֹדַע
 קִיּוֹם הַהִבְטָחָה. וְאִם עַל פִּי שְׁעָדִין לֹא
 הִגִּיעַ הַזְמָן, מִכָּל מָקוֹם לֹא נֹדַע לָהֶם
 בְּקִיּוֹם הַהִבְטָחָתוֹ. וְעַם כָּל זֶה לֹא תִקַּן
 הַלְשׁוֹן, שֶׁהִיא רְאוּי לֵאמֹר “לֹא הִוָּדַעְתִּי,
 אוֹ שִׁיאֵמַר וּשְׁמִי ה' לֹא נֹדַע לָהֶם.”
 וְאוּלַּי לְדַעְתּוֹ יֵאמַר: וּשְׁמִי ה' וְלֹא
 נִוָּדַעְתִּי לָהֶם, כְּלוּמַר שֶׁלֹּא נִוָּדַעְתִּי לָהֶם
 בּוֹ.

וְהִתְחַבֵּם רַבִּי אַבְרָהָם פֶּרֶשׁ כִּי בִי”ת בְּאֵל
 שְׁדִי (פְּסוּק ג.) מוֹשְׁכֶת, וְשַׁעֲוִיר:
 וְאֵרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם וְגו' בְּאֵל שְׁדִי וּבְשְׁמִי ה'
 לֹא נִוָּדַעְתִּי לָהֶם. וְעִנְיָן הַכָּתוּב, כִּי נִרְאָה
 לְאַבֹת בְּשֵׁם הַזֶּה שֶׁהוּא מְנַצֵּחַ מַעֲרֻכֹת
 שְׁמַיִם וְלַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּם נִסִּים גְּדוֹלִים שֶׁלֹּא
 נִתְבַּטַּל מֵהֶם מְנַהֵג הָעוֹלָם, בְּרַעֲב פָּדָה
 אוֹתָם מִמָּוֶת וּבְמִלְחָמָה מִיַּד חֶרֶב, וְלָתֵת
 לָהֶם עֹשֶׁר וְכָבוֹד וְכָל טוֹבָה, וְהֵם כָּכָל
 הַיְעוּדִים שֶׁבַּתּוֹרָה בְּבִרְכּוֹת וּבִקְלָלוֹת, כִּי
 לֹא תָבֹא עַל אָדָם טוֹבָה בְּשֹׂכֵר מִצּוּה אוֹ
 רָעָה בְּעֹנֵשׁ עֲבֵרָה רַק בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַנֶּס, וְאִם
 יִנָּח הָאָדָם לְטַבְּעוֹ אוֹ לְמִזְלוֹ לֹא יוֹסִיפוּ בּוֹ
 מַעֲשָׂיו דָּבָר וְלֹא יִגְרַעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ. אֲבָל שֹׂכֵר
 כָּל הַתּוֹרָה וְעֹנֵשׁ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה הַכֹּל נִסִּים
 וְהֵם נִסְתָּרִים, יִחַשֵׁב בָּהֶם לְרוֹאִים שֶׁהוּא
 מְנַהֵגוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, וְהֵם בְּאָדָם עֹנֵשׁ וּשְׂכָר
 בְּאַמֶּת.

It is for this reason that the Torah speaks at great length of the assurances concerning this world, and does not explain the assurances of the soul in the world of souls. These wonders which go contrary to nature, while the existence of the soul [after the death of the body] and its cleaving unto God are the proper way inherent in its nature that she returneth unto Who gave it. I will explain it further if God accomplishes it for me.

Thus God said to Moses: "I have appeared to the patriarchs with the might of My arm with which I prevail over the constellations and help those whom I have chosen, but with My Name Yud Hey with which all existence came into being I was not made known to them, that is, to create new things for them by the open change of nature. And therefore say unto the children of Israel: I am YHWH and inform them once again of the Great Name, for by that Name I will deal wondrously with them, and they will know that I am the God that maketh all things."

All the words of Rabbi Abraham on this matter were correct except that he was as one who prophesies but does not know it. Even according to his interpretation, the verse should have said, "And I made Myself known to Abraham, etc., by the name of El Shadai, but by My Name YHWH, I did not make Myself known to them," or it should have said, "but by the Name YHWH I did not appear to them." However, he can answer this by saying that because the prophecy of the patriarchs came to them in the visions of the night. He said here, Vaeira (And I appeared) to them, and because that of Moses was face to face, He said here, "I made Me not known to them [the patriarchs] as I made Myself known to you [Moses]."

ומפני זה תאריך התורה ביעודים שבעולם הזה, ולא תבאר יעודי הנפש בעולם הנשמות, כי אלה מופתים שפנגד התולדה, וקיום הנפש ודבקה באלהים הוא דבר ראוי בתולדתה שהיא תשוב אל האלהים אשר נתנה. ועוד אפרש זה (ויקרא כ"ו, י"א). אם גומר ה' עלי.

והנה אמר האלהים למשה: נראיתי לאבות "בכח ידי" אשר אני שודד בו המזלות ועוזר לבחירי, אבל בשמי של יו"ד ה"א אשר בו נהיה כל הוה לא נודעתי להם לברא להם חדשות בשנוי התולדות, ולכן אמר לבני ישראל אני ה' (פסוק ו'), ותודיע להם פעם אחרת השם הגדול כי בו אני עושה עמם להפליא, "וידעו כי אני ה'" עושה כל.

וידקו כל דברי ר"א בענין הזה, אלא שהוא כמתנבא ואינו יודע. והנה גם לדבריו היה ראוי שיאמר הכתוב: "ואודע אל אברהם וגו' באל שדי ובשמי ה' לא נודעתי להם". "או שיאמר ובשמי ה' לא נראיתי להם". אבל הוא יתקן בזה, כי מפני היות נבואת האבות במראות של הלילה אמר בהם וארא, ובעבור היות של משה פנים אל פנים אמר לא נודעתי להם, כאשר נודעתי לה.

By way of the Truth, the verse can be explained in consonance with its plain meaning and intent. He is saying: "I YHWH appeared to the patriarchs through the speculum of El Shadai," just as is the sense of the verse, "In a vision do I make Myself known to him." "But Myself, I YHWH did not make Myself known to them, as they did not contemplate [Me] through a lucid speculum so that they should know me," just as is the sense of the verse, "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the `knew face to face." The patriarchs did know the Proper Name of YHWH, but it was not known to them through prophecy. Therefore when Abraham spoke with God, he mentioned the Proper Name together with the Name Aleph Dalet or Aleph Dalet alone. The purport thereof is that the revelation of the Divine Presence and His communication with them came to them through an ameliorated attribute of justice, and with that attribute was His conduct towards them. But with Moses, His conduct and His recognition to him were by the attribute of mercy, which is indicated by His Great Name, just as is denoted in the verse, "He caused His glorious name to go at the right hand of Moses," and it is written, "So didst Thou lead Thy people, to make Thyself a glorious name." Therefore Moses does not henceforth mention the name El Shadai for the Torah was given with His great Name, as it is said, "I am YHWH thy God." This is the sense of the verse, Our of heaven He made thee to hear His voice, that He might instruct thee; and upon earth He made thee to see His great fire. I have already alluded to the explanation of the word hashamayim (the heaven). May the Holy One, blessed be He, open our eyes and show us wonders of His Torah.

AND I HAVE ALSO ESTABLISHED MY COVENANT WITH THEM... AND MOREOVER I HAVE HEARD THE GROANING OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. The meaning thereof is as follows: "I have appeared to the patriarchs by the Name EL SHADAI and I have also established this covenant [by this Divine Name] before Me, and moreover with My Great Name I have now heard the groaning of the children of Israel, and I have remembered My covenant which I have established for them with Me." The wise will understand.

וַעֲלֶה דְרֹךְ הָאֱמֶת בְּאֵל הַתּוֹב בְּפִשּׁוּטוֹ
וּמִשְׁמָעוֹ, יֹאמֶר אֲנִי ה' נִרְאִיתִי לָהֶם
בְּאַסְפִּקְלָרְיָא שֶׁל אֵל שְׂדֵי, כְּטַעַם: בְּמִרְאָה
אֱלֹי אֲתוֹדֵעַ (בְּמִדְבָּר י"ב, ו'), "וְאֹתִי אֲנִי
ה'" לֹא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם, שֶׁלֹּא נִסְתַּכְּלוּ
בְּאַסְפִּקְלָרְיָא הַמְּאִירָה (זֶהר וְאֵרָא כ"ו, א').
"שִׁידְעוּ אוֹתִי", כְּטַעַם: אֲשֶׁר יָדְעוּ ה'
פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים (דְּבָרִים ל"ד, י'), כִּי הָעֲבֹת
יָדְעוּ ה' הַמִּיחָד אֲבָל לֹא נִודַע לָהֶם
בְּנִבּוּאָה, וְלִכֵּן כְּשִׁידְבֵּר אֲבָרְהָם עִם הָשָׁם
יִזְכִּיר הָשָׁם הַמִּיחָד עִם אֱלֹהֵי דָלֶת, אוֹ אֱלֹהֵי
דָלֶת לְבָדוֹ (בְּרֵאשִׁית ט"ו, ב'. י"ח, ל"ב). וְהִנֵּה
הָעֲנִין, שֶׁהָעֲבֹת הִיָּה גִלּוּי הַשְׂכִּינָה לָהֶם
וְהַדְּבֹר עִמָּהֶם בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין רַפָּה וְנִהְיָ
עִמָּהֶם בְּהַ, וְעַם מֹשֶׁה יִתְנַהֵג וְיִודַע בְּמִדַּת
הַרְחָמִים שֶׁהוּא בְּשֵׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל, כְּטַעַם:
מוֹלִיד לִימִין מֹשֶׁה זְרוּעַ תַּפְאָרְתּוֹ (יִשְׁעִיָּה
ס"ג, י"ב), וּכְתִיב: כֵּן נִהְיָת עִמָּךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת
לְךָ שֵׁם תַּפְאָרֶת (שָׁם י"ד). וְלִכֵּן לֹא יִזְכִּיר
מֹשֶׁה מִעֲתָה שֵׁם אֵל שְׂדֵי, כִּי הַתּוֹרָה
בְּשֵׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל נִתְּנָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: אֲנֹכִי ה'
אֱלֹהֶיךָ (לֵהֲלֹן כ', ב'), וְהוּא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: מִן
הַשָּׁמַיִם הַשְׁמִיעֶךָ אֶת קוֹלוֹ לִיִּסְרֹךְ וְעַל
הָאָרֶץ הִרְאָךְ אֶת אֲשׁוֹ הַגָּדוֹלָה (דְּבָרִים ד',
ל"ו). וּכְבֹר רַמְזֹתִי פְרוּשׁ "הַשָּׁמַיִם".
(בְּרֵאשִׁית א', ח'). וְהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִגְלֶה
עֵינֵינוּ וְיִרְאֵנוּ נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרָתוֹ.

וְטַעַם: וְגַם הִקְמַתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם, (לֵהֲלֹן
ו', ד'). וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי (שָׁם פְּסוּק
ה'), כְּלוֹמֵר נִרְאִיתִי לָהֶם בְּאֵל שְׂדֵי "וְגַם
הִקְמַתִי לָהֶם הַבְּרִית הַהוּא לִפְנֵי", וְגַם
בְּשֵׁמי הַגָּדוֹל שָׁמַעְתִּי עֲתָה אֲנִי נֹאקֶת בְּנִי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר הִקְמַתִי
לָהֶם עִמָּדִי, וְהַמְשָׁכִיל יֵבִין.

Now as regards what our Rabbis have expounded: [the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses], "Alas for those that we gone, and are no more to be found! Many a time did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the Name El Shadai and I did not inform them that My Name is YHWH as I have said it to you, and yet none of them cast aspersions upon My dealings with them, etc. Moreover, none of them asked Me what My Name is, as you asked. Right at the beginning of My mission, you said to Me, 'What is Your Name?' And at the end you said, 'For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath dealt ill with this people, etc.'" It is in connection with this that God said to Moses, "And I have also established My covenant with them, etc." The purport of this Midrash likewise fits in with the text. The Rabbis, of blessed memory, found it difficult to understand why God mentioned the prophecy of the patriarchs altogether, diminishing their accomplishment in prophecy and saying that He appeared to them only by the Name of El Shadai. What purpose did that serve? He could have said, "I am YHWH and wherefore say unto the children of Israel: 'I am the YHWH, and I will bring you [from under the burdens of the Egyptians], and you shall know that I am YHWH Who brought you out.'" Therefore the Rabbis explained that the message constituted a rebuke to Moses, telling him: "Behold, the patriarchs, whose accomplishment in prophecy was not as high as yours inasmuch as they contemplated Deity only through the Name El Shadai, though they believed in Me, And I have also established My covenant with them, and I have heard the groaning of their children for their sake. Surely you who have known Me by the Great Name and whom I have given My assurance [by that Name], you should have trusted in My mercies and assured Israel in My Name that I will do signs and wonders for them." This interpretation too is correct and fitting.

יְהוָה שֶׁדָּרְשׁוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ בְּעֵנִין הַזֶּה (שמו"ר ו', ד'): חָבַל עַל דָּאֲבָדִין וְלֹא גִשְׁתַּכְּחִין, הִרְבָּה פְּעָמִים נִגְלִיתִי עַל אֲבֹרָהּם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי, וְלֹא הוֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם שְׁמִי ה' כְּשֵׁם שְׁאֻמְרָתִי לָךְ, לֹא הִרְהָרוּ אַחֵר מִדּוֹתַי וְכוּ', וְעוֹד שְׁלֹא שְׁאֻלוֹנִי מַה שְׁמִי כְּשֵׁם שְׁשֹׂאֵלָתָ אֶתָּה, אֶתָּה תַּחֲלִית שְׁלִיחוֹתַי אֲמַרְתָּ לִּי מַה שְׁמִי, וְלִבְסוּף אֲמַרְתָּ וּמֵאֵז בְּאֵתִי אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְגו' (לְעִיל ה', כ"ג), וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם וְגו' (פְּסוּק ד'), גַּם הִמְדָּרְשׁ הַזֶּה עֲנִינוּ מִתִּישָׁב אַחֵר הַמִּקְרָא, כִּי הִקְשָׁה לָהֶם ז"ל, לָמָּה יִזְכִּיר נְבוֹאָת הָאֲבוֹת לַפְּחוֹת מַעֲלָתָם בְּנְבוּאָה וְלֹאֲמַר שְׁלֹא נִרְאָה אֲלֵיהֶם רַק בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי, מַה צֶּרֶף הָיָה לוֹ זֶה, הָיָה רָאוּי לוֹמַר: אֲנִי ה' (פְּסוּק ב'), וְלָכֵן אָמַר לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה' וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם (פְּסוּק ו'). וְיִדְעֻתָם כִּי אֲנִי ה' הַמוֹצִיא (פְּסוּק ז'). וְלָכֵן יִדְרְשׁוּ כִּי הָיָה הַדָּבָר תּוֹכְחָה לְמֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר לוֹ: הִנֵּה הָאֲבוֹת שְׁלֹא הִגִּיעָה לָהֶם מַעֲלָתָם בְּנְבוּאָה אֲלִיד וְלֹא רָאוּ רַק בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי, הֵם הָאֲמִינוּ בִּי, וְגַם הִקְיִמוּתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם "וְשִׁמַּעְתִּי נִאֲקַת בְּנֵיהֶם בְּעִבּוּרָם". אֵף כִּי אֶתָּה שִׁידַעְתָּנִי בְּשֵׁם הַגְּדוֹל וְהַבְּטָחְתִּידָּ בּוּ, שִׁישׁ לָךְ לְבַטָּח בְּרַחֲמִים וּלְהַבְטִיחַ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשִׁמִּי שְׁאֻעָשָׂה עִמָּהֶם אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים. וְגַם זֶה נִכּוֹן וְהַגּוֹן.