

Elokim, HaShem and El Shaddai

Three names of God

Gen. 6:2. Elokim [God] spoke to Moses, and He said to him, "I am HASHEM [YHVH, the Lord].

3. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob with [the name] El Shaddai [Almighty God], but [with] My name HASHEM, I did not become known to them.

Why? Three different aspects of the divine:

- Elokim reflects justice
- HaShem reflects mercy
- El Shaddai reflects strength

Four interpretations of quote:

1. Reproach

Talmud, Sanhedrin 111a

[Ex. 5:22. And Moses returned to the Lord, and said, Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why have you sent me?

23. For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have you saved your people at all.]

Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him [Moses], '... how many times did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name of El Shaddai,[God Almighty] and they did not question my character, [i.e., my attributes, my dealings with man, whether my promises were reliable] nor say to Me, What is Your name?

-I said to Abraham, 'Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it,' for I will give it to you' [Gen. 13:17] yet when he sought a place to bury Sarah, he did not find one, but had to purchase it for 400 silver shekels; and still he did not question My character.

-I said to Isaac, 'Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you' [Gen. 26:3], yet his servants sought water to drink, and did not find it without its being disputed, as it is said, 'And the herdmen of Gerar strove with Isaac's herdmen saying, The water is ours' [Gen. 20] still he did not question My character.

-I said to Jacob, 'The land on which you lie, I will give to you, and to your seed' [Gen. 28:13.] yet he sought a place to pitch his tent and did not find one until he purchased it for 100 kesitah; [Gen. 33:19] nevertheless he did not question My character.

-Nor did they say to me, What is Your name?

[Soncino: The emphasis laid here upon the name of God, the virtue ascribed to the Patriarchs for refraining to ask it, and the reproach that Moses had wished to know it, are due to the fact that God's name was regarded as more than a mere title of distinction. It represented His character, His Attributes, and the relationship in which He stood to His people. Consequently, to refrain from asking after God's name was the equivalent of displaying complete confidence in Him, without examining his character closely to see whether His promises were reliable; while to ask it was to betray a lack of confidence.]

-And now you say to Me, 'Neither have you saved your people at all.'
[Therefore] Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh [Gen. 6:1.]

Actually God did give His name (HaShem) to Abraham:

Gen. 15:7. And he said to him [Abram], I am HASHEM who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.

8. And he said, Adonai HASHEM, how shall I know that I shall inherit it?

but did not make him experience what this name implies.

Midrash: [Tanchuma Buber, Va'era 4]

-'God spoke to Moses.' He called him to account since he [Moses] had spoken harshly by saying, 'Why have You harmed this people?' (Exod. 5:22)

Rabbi Eliahu Mizrahi [the Re-em] (1450-1525), Chief Rabbi of Turkish Empire [Sefer Ha-Mizrahi]: Moses' arrival in Egypt coincided with harsh decree of slaves not being allowed to use straw. But what the people did not understand was that this HASTENED exodus because God was waiting for Egypt to reach bottom of evil ('God is patient even with the wicked').

2. Different purposes: Reward or punishment

Rashi: 'And He said to him, I am the Lord.' [Meaning: I am] faithful to reward all who walk before Me. I did not send you [to Pharaoh] except to fulfill My words, which I spoke to the Patriarchs

-'Ani HaShem' -- 'I am the Lord' means 'I am faithful to exact retribution' when stated in conjunction with [an act warranting] punishment, e.g., 'or you will profane the name of your God; I am the Lord' (Lev. 19:12).

-It means 'I am] faithful to give reward' when stated in conjunction with the fulfillment of commandments, e.g., 'And you shall keep My commandments and perform them; I am the Lord' (Lev. 22:31),

3. I was not recognized by the Patriarchs

-Rashi: 'I appeared' to the fathers 'with [the name] Almighty God [El Shaddai]'. I made promises to them, in all of which I said to them, I am the Almighty God 'but [with] My name HASHEM, I did not become known to them.'
-It is not written here 'lo hoda3ti', meaning 'but My Name HASHEM I did not make known to them,' but 'lo noda3ti', meaning 'I did not become known.'
-[I.e.,] I was not recognized by the Patriarchs with My attribute of keeping faith, by dint of which My name is called HASHEM, [which means that I am] faithful to fulfill My words, for I made promises to them but did not fulfill [them while they were alive].

4. No miracles before, but miracles now

Ramban: 'El Shaddai' means 'the Sufficient One', the one who sets limits based on laws of nature. These laws were observed with Patriarchs: God just helped them survive famines, prevail against their enemies and amass wealth. But with Exodus, God became 'HaShem', breaking laws of nature.