

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XIV: Va'era (Ex. 6:2–9:35)

Essay 1. A promise to be fulfilled, but with some punishment

At the end of the last parsha, Shemot, Moses and Aaron asked Pharaoh to release the Israelites for three days, so that they could travel into the wilderness and make sacrifices to G-d. Pharaoh refused, and ordered harsher work conditions on the Israelites, who then condemned Moses and Aaron. The closing verses of parshat Shemot read as follows:

Then Moses returned to the L-rd and said, “O L-rd, *why did You bring harm upon this people?* Why did You send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people.” Then the L-rd said to Moses, “*Now you will see* what I will do to Pharaoh: he will let them go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.”

- Ex. 5:22–6:1

Rashi comments on Ex. 6:1 that by saying, “*Now you will see,*” G-d was rebuking Moses, and effectively saying: “You have criticized My methods of guiding the world. You are not like Abraham, to whom I said, ‘for through Isaac shall seed be raised unto you’ (Gen. 21:12) and to whom I afterwards said, ‘bring him up as a burnt offering’ (Gen. 22:2), and yet he did not criticize My ways. Therefore, *now you will see.* What will be done to Pharaoh you will see, but you won’t see what will be done to the kings of the seven nations of Canaan when I shall bring [the Israelites] into the Holy Land.”

**פסוק** "וְאַרְאֶה אֶל-אַבְרָהָם" וכו', פירש רש"י הבטחתים הבטחות ובכלם אמתתי להם אני אל שדי. ופירש הרא"ם שהחילוק שיש בין הבטחת אל שדי להבטחת שם הוי"ה, הוינו שהבטחת שם הוי"ה מתקיימת על כל פנים בין קטאו בין לא קטאו, והבטחה עם אל שדי אינה מתקיימת רק בתנאי שלא יקטאו. ואף על פי שהבטחתי וכו' אף על פי כן מחוייב אני לקיים אותה ההבטחה, לפי שהיתה הבטחה עם הברית עכ"ל.

Va'era then begins with the following **verse[s]**: “G-d spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the L-rd. **And I appeared** to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as ‘G-d Almighty,’ but My name ‘the L-rd’ [i.e., the Tetragrammaton, the four-lettered name] I did not make known to them. I also

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established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.” (Ex. 6:2–5).

**Rashi explained** the words “G-d Almighty” in Ex. 6:3: **“I made certain promises to them and in the case of all of these I said unto them, ‘I am G-d Almighty.’ ”**

**The Re'em<sup>1</sup> explained that the distinction between the promise [in the name] of “G-d Almighty” and the promise in “the Name of Existence” [i.e., the Tetragrammaton],<sup>2</sup> was that a promise in the name of the Tetragrammaton is fulfilled regardless of whether [the recipients] sin or do not sin, but the promise [in the name of] “G-d Almighty” is fulfilled only under the condition that they do not sin. It’s as though G-d is saying: “Although I have promised etc. That is, My promise to give them the Land of Canaan was made under condition that they didn’t sin, and one could say that the promise need not be fulfilled because they have sinned. Nevertheless, even though My promise was made in the name of ‘G-d Almighty’ and not in the name of the Tetragrammaton, I am obligated to fulfill this promise, because this was a promise made under the covenant.”**

וְקָשָׁה טוֹבָא דְאֵם הַבְּטָחָה בְּאֵל שְׁדֵי עִם בְּרִית מוֹעֵלֶת אִף אִם יִסְטָאוּ, כִּי הִיא יְכוּלָה לְעֲשׂוֹת עִם הָאֲבוֹת הַהַבְּטָחָה בְּשֵׁם הוִי"ה. וְעוֹד מָה תוֹכְחָה הִיא זֹ לְמִנְשָׁה, הֲלֹא הַבְּטָחָה זֶה הֵינּוּ כְּמוֹ הַבְּטָחַת שֵׁם הוִי"ה?

**This is very difficult, for if the promise made with G-d Almighty under the covenant is effective even with sinners, then the Holy One, Blessed be He, was able to make the same promise with the patriarchs in the name of the Tetragrammaton.** In other words, is the promise with G-d Almighty under the covenant any less than if the promise had been made in the name of the Tetragrammaton? **Further, what is the meaning of the reproof given by G-d to Moses by saying, “Now you will see,” for isn’t this promise like a promise in the name of the Tetragrammaton?”** In other words, if the promise made to the patriarchs was just as good as if it had been made in the name of the Tetragrammaton, such that G-d was obligated to fulfill that promise, why were the Israelites still suffering, and why was Moses wrong to ask the question?

וְנִרְאָה שְׁזוֹ הִיא כְּנוֹנֶת הַפְּסוּקָה, אֲתָה אָמַרְתָּ לְמָה הִרְעוֹת וְלֹא הִבַּנְתָּ שְׂאֵנֵי הַבְּטָחָתִי לְאֲבוֹת בְּאֵל שְׁדֵי עִם הַבְּרִית דִּהְיִינוּ כְּמוֹ הַבְּטָחַת שֵׁם הוִי"ה. וְלָמָּה "וְשָׁמִי ה' לֹא נוֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם" אִם הִכֵּל אָחָד, אֲלֹא נִדְאִי מִפְּנֵי שְׂשָׁם שְׁדֵי מוֹרָה עַל הַדִּין, דִּהְיִינוּ מִי שְׂאֵמֶר לְעוֹלָם דִּי יֵאמֶר לְצִרּוֹתֵיהֶם דִּי, וְאִם כֵּן נִרְאָה מִכָּאן שְׂקוּדָם שְׂתַתְּקִיִּים הַהַבְּטָחָה יֵשׁ לָהֶם לְסָבוֹל צָרוֹת וְאֲתָה אָמַרְתָּ "לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה".

**It seems that this is the intention of the verse: You said, “Why [did You bring] harm [upon the people],”<sup>3</sup> and you did not understand that I promised the patriarchs in the name**

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (c. 1455– 1525 or 1526), Talmudist and mathematician.

<sup>2</sup> The author writes many of the names of G-d in this work, but he does not write out the Tetragrammaton. Instead, the anagram הוִי"ה, the “Name of Existence,” is used to represent the Tetragrammaton.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. 5:22: “Then Moses returned to the L-rd and said, “O L-rd, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me?”

of G-d Almighty with the covenant, which is like a promise in the name of the Tetragrammaton in that I am obligated to fulfill the promise. Why does Scripture say, “but My name ‘the L-rd’ I did not make known to them”? What is the distinction, if there is one? Rather, it’s certainly because there the term “Almighty” (אֱלֹהִים) (*Shaddai*) is teaching about the justice required, which mandates that sinners be punished. A promise in the name of the Tetragrammaton would have been fulfilled even if they had sinned, and perhaps then without any punishment. A promise in the name of G-d Almighty is usually conditional upon the recipient of the promise not sinning, but in this case, as I had made a covenant with the patriarchs, the promise was absolute rather than conditional. However, punishment was still required for their sins.

**That is, One that says to the world: “Enough!” (אֵין) (*dai*), will say “Enough!” with regard to their suffering.** I.e., our sages interpret the etymology of G-d’s name “*Shaddai*” as “*she’dai*” (that it’s enough), originally with regard to His creation of the world.<sup>4</sup> In this context, He says “Enough!” that the Israelites have suffered enough for their sins. **If so, it appears from here that before the promise will be fulfilled, they need to suffer, and** therefore it was wrong for you, Moses, that you said, “Why [did You bring] harm [upon the people].”

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<sup>4</sup> Chagigah 12a: “Reish Lakish said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: ‘I am G-d Almighty [*El Shaddai*]’ (Gen. 17:1)? [It means] I am He Who said to the world ‘enough [*dai*]’ [instructing it to stop expanding].”