

זכור אתיוּם השבת לקדשו.
ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל-מלאכתך,
יום השביעי שבת לה'

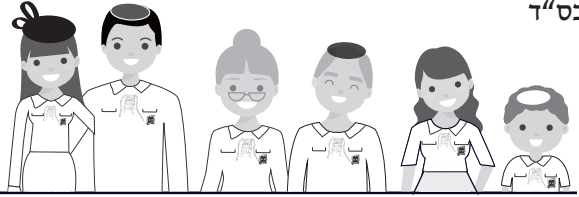
PARASHAT VA'ERA
28TH TEIVEIT 5783
20TH & 21ST JANUARY 2023
VOLUME 33 ISSUE 11



בס"ד

SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK



"AND YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM GOD" BEN ROTHSTEIN SHEVET AVICHAI

The opening pesukim of *parashat Va'era* are obscure; they refer to God by not only His four-letter name (known as the tetragrammaton, which I'll write as YHWH), but also other titles:

And *Elohim* spoke to Moshe, and said to him 'I am YHWH. And I appeared to Abraham, to Yitzchak and to Ya'akov as *El Shaddai*, but my name YHWH I did not make known to them.' (*Shemot* 6:2-3)

Not only are the meanings of these names as yet unclear, but ostensibly the above statement is incorrect; God does indeed appear to Avraham with the divine name YHWH, way back in *Bereishit* 15:7-8. However, upon further scrutiny of those *pesukim*, a further oddity is revealed. The *pesukim* state:

And He said to him, 'I am YHWH, who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldees to give to you this land, to inherit it.' And [Avraham] said, '*Adonai Elohim*, how will I know that I will inherit it?' (*Bereishit* 15:7-8)

God introduces himself as YHWH, and Avraham replies with the words '*Adonai Elohim*!' What did God try to communicate to Avraham and what message did Avraham receive?

As per Maimonides, the only true name of God is that of YHWH; the other 'names' are instead epithets used to refer to God, but they do not capture any of His essence. He states explicitly that the uniqueness of YHWH is that it 'expresses a clear expression of [God's] essence, that has no partner' (*Guide of the Perplexed*

1:61), i.e. that it cannot be used in reference to anything besides God. All other epithets used for God, including *Elohim*, can be used to describe other beings, and are in fact used in polytheistic contexts to refer to false gods. For example, the head of the Canaanite pantheon is *El*, from which *Elohim* is derived.

Perhaps one could suggest that God is telling Moshe that, until now, there has not been a true, overt demonstration of YHWH in the world. Even Avraham, who came to know God on his own, could not fully comprehend what Moshe, with his unique level of prophecy, could: that God is something totally apart from, incompatible with and omnipotent over this world. (See also *Nefesh HaChaim* III 13:2.)

Relating this back into the story of the exodus, we see now why the understanding that God is YHWH is crucial to the theological message. The idea of God as *Elohim* was not unpalatable to Pharaoh; in fact, this expression of God was already known to him, as the *pasuk* recounts:

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-עֲבָדָיו הֲנִמְצָא כֹהֵן אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ

And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Could we find another like this one? A man in whom is the spirit of *Elohim*." (*Bereishit* 41:38)

The concept of God that Pharaoh is unaware of is that of YHWH. At first, he is prepared to acknowledge the existence of another deity. However, the statement God intends to make via the ten plagues - targeted attacks against Egyptian theology - and the exodus is to show His true essence, as expressed by the name YHWH; that is, of a single, omnipotent God, whose name and essence cannot be coupled with anything.

BEN IS IN SHEVET AVICHAI AND WAS ROSH OF H-COURSE 5783

London	In 16:13	Out 17:22	Cambridge	In 16:12	Out 17:23	Oxford	In 16:19	Out 17:30
Manchester	In 16:16	Out 17:29	Nottingham	In 16:14	Out 17:26	Birmingham	In 16:19	Out 17:31
Leeds	In 16:12	Out 17:26	Liverpool	In 16:19	Out 17:32	Bristol	In 16:26	Out 17:36
Thaxted	In 16:12	Out 17:23	Brighton	In 16:19	Out 17:28	Jerusalem	In 16:26	Out 17:42

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS SHABBAT - EXCERPT FROM OUR CHOVERET:

Marking Mental Health Awareness Shabbat this week, *madrichim* in *svivot* around the country will be discussing mental health and Judaism with their *chanichim* this week. Here is an excerpt from our weekly educational booklet, or *choveret*, given to *madrichim* this week:

Why couldn't the Jews hear Moshe?

Shemot 6:9

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
מִקּוֹצֵר רוּחַ וּמִעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

And Moshe spoke [that God would rescue the Jewish people from slavery] to the children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe, because of shortness of spirit and difficult work.

Discussion Point: What do you think it means that they did not listen because of 'shortness of breath and difficult work'?

Ramban *ibid*.

מִקּוֹצֵר רוּחַ וּמִעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה לֹא בִּעְבוּר שְׂלֵא יֵאֱמִינוּ
בֵּה' וּבִנְבִיאָו, רַק שְׂלֵא הָטוּ אוֹזְנוֹ לְדַבְרֵי מִקּוֹצֵר רוּחַ,
כִּאֲדָם שֶׁתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁוֹ בְּעַמְלוֹ, וְלֹא יִרְצֵה לַחֲיוֹת רִגַע
בְּצַעְרוֹ, מִדַּעְתּוֹ שִׂירֹחַ לוֹ אַחֲרָי כֵּן

'Because of shortness of spirit and difficult work.' Not because they didn't believe in Hashem or in his prophet [Moshe]; just that they didn't pay attention to his words because of 'shortness of spirit' – like a person whose mind becomes sick of their difficulty, and doesn't want to live a moment

longer in this pain, even if they know that it'll get better after this.

Discussion Point: How would you go about Moshe's task of liberating the Jews from their depressed mindset? Do you think Moshe is effective at this?

Rabbi Dweck:

The Israelites' mental health had been compromised and weakened as a result of relentless and meaningless labour, persecution and trauma. It was not that they did not care. It was that they did not at the time have the ability to take in the music. Their oppression and suffering were not only physical, but also mental and Moses had to liberate them from both.

Perhaps a better translation of the pasuk we started with would be:

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִקּוֹצֵר
רוּחַ וּמִעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

And Moshe spoke [that God would rescue the Jewish people from slavery] to the children of Israel, but they couldn't hear Moshe, because of shortness of spirit and difficult work.

WINTER MACHANE IN PICTURES



TORAH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

HAKHAM DAVID NIETO | NAHALA 28TH TEIVEIT



Returning to Carrasco International Airport [MVD], we now make haste towards England's green and pleasant land, via the same stopover in *Aeropuerto Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas* [MAD] and then on to London Heathrow [LHR]. Hop on the new Elizabeth Line and we can go straight to Liverpool Street, cross over Bishopsgate and walk down to Bevis Marks.

Hakham David Nieto was the Chief Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese (S&P) Jews in London between 1701 and his death in 1728. During this time, he was incredibly prolific in both writings and sermons on some of the most controversial and complex scientific topics that held currency at the time. In the wake of Spinoza, Sabbatai Zevi, Newton's *Principia* and Hobbesian materialism, not only the Jewish world but the whole edifice of religious life and social order was straining under the weight of these philosophical and scientific ideas.

Nieto was born in Venice in 1654 and studied medicine at the University of Padua. He moved to Livorno and served as a *dayyan*, communal Rabbi and doctor. Whilst still in Livorno, he penned the work *Pascalogia*, discussing the relationship between the different dates of Easter and the date of Pesach. Interestingly, this work was dedicated to a friend of his, Cardinal Francesco Maria de Medici (later to become the Duke of Montefeltro).



In 1701, the S&P *ma'amad* in London sought Nieto as their new *hakham*, replacing Solomon Ayllon, who was suspected of maintaining Sabbatean proclivities, and had left London for Amsterdam. Barely two years into the job and Hakham Nieto succeeded in ruffling some feathers. On the 20th November 1703, he gave a *shiur* at Bevis Marks dealing with the Deistic position of a mechanistic universe. As a prelude: with Newton's *Principia* outlining a mechanistic, mathematically predictable universe, and the prevalent Deist position that indeed there is a God, but He doesn't concern Himself with the affairs of man, a common view was surfacing of an autonomous authority called 'Nature', which runs the world independently of God. Hakham Nieto harshly condemned this notion, stating that it flies in the face of basic Jewish belief. He cites many sources from *Tehillim* as well as Rabbinic formulations, such as **נְשִׁיב הַרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם**, 'God blows the wind and pours down the rain,' as evidence that all phenomena attributed to Nature in pagan thought are attributed instead to God. Even the Hebrew word **טבע** was only introduced in the Middle Ages under Arabic influence. Instead, said Nieto, 'God is nature.'

One can only imagine that, in the wake of Spinoza, a statement like that didn't go down too well. Spinoza's pantheist position of '*deus sive natura*' – God

and nature are interchangeable – had led to seeing divinity in all existence, since it is all the movement of nature/God, as well as to Spinoza's excommunication. Although this wasn't what Nieto meant (as we shall see in a moment), some of his detractors who had Sabbatean leanings jumped on this opportunity to accuse him of heresy. Nieto subsequently composed *De la Divina Providencia*, in which he clarified his position: '[W]hen I say that Nature is God, it means that He provides and makes all these things [e.g. rain, dew]. Men, however, capriciously invented the idea that it is Nature which makes all these.' In essence, both mediate and immediate acts are performed by God, albeit some through the 'guise' of 'nature'. Furthermore, in a pasuk such as **הַמְכַסֶּה שָׁמַיִם בְּעָבָיִם**, 'The One who covers the heavens with clouds (*Tehillim* 147),' there are three syntactic entities: the subject (God), the object (the heavens) and the instrument or means (the clouds); thus Nieto argues that it is impossible to argue a pantheistic position without conflating the subject with the instrument! Creation is not metaphysical, but rather semiotic; merely signifying God, not encapsulating Him. Unsatisfied with the failed attempt at removing Hakham Nieto from office, *De la Divina Providencia* ended up being sent to the Ashkenazi *Hakham Tzvi* in Amsterdam (given the title *Hakham* by his Sepharadi teachers in Salonica and Istanbul, after seeing his erudition), who ruled that this was indeed basic Jewish philosophy, and commended Hakham Nieto on taking this stance.

Later in life, Hakham Nieto composed his *magnum opus*, the *Matteh Dan* (or 'The Kuzari 2: the Sequel'). In it, he systematically, logically and quasi-scientifically defended the Oral Law, as the Kuzari had done for the written law. One of the fascinating points in it, however, is Nieto's refusal to pursue scientific or physical meaning to any of the commandments. Despite being described as a 'rationalist', he employs the analogy of medicine for the body: just as a physical medicine heals the body without the patient understanding how it works, so too *mitzvot* heal the soul without understanding the meaning behind them. Nieto sees all minutiae of the law as being divinely mandated and equates all *mitzvot* ultimately with the law of the ashes of the *parah adumah*, the quintessential *chok* that lies beyond our understanding. By adopting this position, Nieto subtly removed all *mitzvot* from the realm of rational discussion, such that the findings of science would be unable to challenge the validity of *mitzva* observance.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- **London SBM** continues this **Thursday 26th** January from 7pm at Kinloss.

- **Lishmah** for bogrot and sixth-form women continues this **Tuesday 24th January!** Join this **dynamic makom torah** for women!

- Bnei Akiva will be **back on the road this February!** The Mazkirut and Shlichim will be travelling the length and breadth of the country's Jew-niversities on the **Campus Roadshow**. See you there!

- **Bnei Akiva** will be sending a delegation to **March of the Living** over 16th-20th April 2023. If you are interseted, please contact Gidon at mazkir@bauk.org.

- **Israel Machane** applications are still open! To view the brochure or sign up visit bauk.org/israel.

- To give any **comments** or **suggestions** to Bnei Akiva, please visit bauk.org/feedback

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE CONTACT BEN AT CHINUCH@BAUK.ORG

BNEI AKIVA CAMPUS ROADSHOW

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Keep your eyes peeled as we come to you for some learning/shmoozing with the mazkirut and shlichim

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