



In Parashat Lekh-Lekha God appears to Avraham and issues the command of *berit mila*, circumcision, the sign of the covenant between Him and Avraham's offspring. God introduces this command by proclaiming, "*Ani Kel Sha-dai, hit'halekh lefanai ve-hyeh tamim*" – "I am the Lord *Sha-ddai*; walk before Me and be complete" (17:1) – marking the first instance in the Torah where we encounter the divine name of *Sha-ddai*. Nachmanides, in his commentary to this verse, cites three approaches taken by the Medieval scholars in explaining the precise denotation of this divine name:

- 1) Rashi interprets *Sha-ddai* as a contraction for the words *she-yeish dai* – "that there is enough" – a shorthand reference to the notion that "there is enough in My divinity for every creature." God's power and control is not subject to any constraints; He is capable of governing and caring for all the earth's creatures, no matter how numerous they become.
- 2) Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (1:63), similarly associates the divine Name *Sha-ddai* with the Hebrew word *dai*, sufficient. However, unlike Rashi, who interprets *Sha-ddai* in reference to God's unlimited power to provide for His creatures, Maimonides speaks in terms of God's intrinsic self-sufficient nature. He explains, "The name *Shaddai*... signifies 'he who is sufficient'; that is to say, He does not require any other being for effecting the existence of what He created, or its conservation; His existence is sufficient for that." *Sha-ddai* refers to the fact that God depends on nobody and nothing else for filling His role as Creator and Sustainer of the earth.
- 3) Finally, Nachmanides cites Ibn Ezra's theory which views *Sha-ddai* as a derivative of the Hebrew verb *sh.d.d.*, which means to "rob" or "overpower." According to Ibn Ezra, this term relates to God's ability to "overpower" the forces of nature and perform miracles in direct opposition to natural law.

Why did God choose to introduce Himself specifically with the divine name of *Sha-ddai* before issuing the command of *berit mila*?

Rashi explains that the connotation of *Sha-ddai* relates to God's exhortation, "walk before Me and be complete." As we saw, Rashi interprets *Sha-ddai* as a reference to God's ability to care for all creatures. He thus explains this verse to mean, "Therefore, walk before Me and I shall be for you a God and benefactor." The quality of *Sha-ddai* is intended as a kind of reassurance that God can and will reward Avraham for his faith and loyalty to God.

Nachmanides, who accepts Ibn Ezra's approach to *Sha-ddai*, explains that God here assures Avraham that he and his descendants shall survive and prosper outside the framework of natural law. After undergoing circumcision, Avraham will beget a son

from Sara despite her infertility, establishing the precedent of supernatural providence that will accompany Avraham's descendants throughout their history.

Maimonides, however, does not address the particular relevance of the name *Shaddai*, which, in his view, relates to God's self-sufficient power as Creator, to this context of *berit mila*. Why would the Almighty emphasize this fundamental tenet – that "He does not require any other being for effecting the existence of what He created" – as He proceeds to issue the command of circumcision? (This question was raised by Rav Moshe Leib Shachor, in his Torah commentary *Avnei Shoham*.)

The answer, perhaps, is that this emphasis was intended to dispel a possible misconception concerning the notion of a *berit*, a covenant. As mentioned earlier, circumcision is not simply an obligation upon Jewish males; it signifies the eternal covenant between the Almighty and Avraham's descendants. By definition, a *berit* entails a mutual, bilateral commitment between two parties. As such, in the context of man's relationship to God, the notion of a "covenant" could be misconceived as reflecting God's dependence on man. One might have concluded that if God initiated this covenant with Avraham and his offspring, then He apparently relies on man's assistance and participation in order to properly sustain and govern the earth. God therefore introduced the command of *berit mila* by declaring, "*Ani Kel Sha-ddai*," reaffirming His self-sufficient strength and power, a tent that is in no way undermined by the *berit* established between *Am Yisrael* and God. God receives no benefit from this covenant, because there is nothing that He lacks and that He must therefore solicit from man through a bilateral agreement. The covenant with God serves to benefit only *Am Yisrael*, as we commit ourselves to a life of devotion and loyalty to God and in exchange are promised His rewards and blessings.