

# טעמו וראו

A taste of the  
Rebbe's teachings

## Chayei Sarah



### Does G-d Really Pay Attention?

What is the Jewish approach to understanding G-d's involvement in the world? Is He involved in every detail, or is He only interested in the 'important' things? The Rambam, the Baal Shem Tov, and the first Chabad Rebbe chime in.

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# Does G-d Really Pay attention?

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“It was from G-d”

(B'reishit 24:50)

## Divine Providence for Fish? Rambam's Opinion

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When a person travels from one place to another, his interest lies only in the points of departure and destination, while the areas he must traverse are secondary to his ultimate goal. However, our Sages teach us (even in the revealed parts of the Torah) that even the journey itself has purpose. When he travels to fulfill a Mitzvah, he is awarded “reward for his footsteps,” and every step creates another positive angel and so on.

This idea is reflected in the Baal Shem Tov's view of Divine Providence, as opposed to the opinion of Rambam in the Guide to the Perplexed.

Now, it is important to point out a distinction between Rambam's Guide to the Perplexed and the Mishneh Torah on Jewish law. The rulings in Mishneh Torah have been accepted as Jewish law, while certain teachings in the Guide to the Perplexed are not to be interpreted literally,<sup>1</sup> and some even come from the mystical elements of the Torah, where matters are evaluated from a higher prism.

...In regard to our discussion: According to Rambam in Guide to the Perplexed,<sup>2</sup> there are certain creations that do not have a unique purpose of their own, rather, they are created “out of necessity.” For example, worms that emerge from rotten fruit are simply a result of two other creations that were created by design: fresh fruit and rotten fruit.

This guides his view of Divine Providence as well.<sup>3</sup> According to the Rambam, G-d orchestrates the general course of events, but minor details – will a certain fish in the sea be swallowed or not – are not included. The two concepts are tied

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1) See Toras Menachem vol. 48 pg. 192 ft. 82.

3) Vol. 3 chp. 17-18.

2) Part 1 cp. 72.

to each other: not everything is created with a direct purpose, and therefore, not everything is included in Divine Providence.

## Providence On Worms? The Baal Shem Tov's Opinion

However, the Baal Shem Tov taught that every detail in the world is guided by G-d's hand,<sup>4</sup> even those creatures that seem to be a result of another creation, like worms from rotten fruit. It's not that there is purpose in fruits rotting, and G-d set in nature that rotting fruit produce worms, so automatically some worms are created. Rather, every single creation of such a worm is directly orchestrated by G-d.

This is not the Baal Shem Tov's innovation, G-d forbid. It is an ancient Jewish belief<sup>5</sup> with foundations in the Talmud. As we discussed at our previous gathering,<sup>6</sup> the Alter Rebbe was asked about the source for the Baal Shem Tov's opinion – because Jewish law cannot be based solely on Kabbalistic teachings – and he pointed out the teaching in the Talmud,<sup>7</sup> “When Rabbi Yochanan would see a *shalach* bird (scooping fish out of the sea), he would say: “Your judgments are (even in) the great deep”,<sup>8</sup> (for you orchestrate the arrival of the *shalach* to carry out your judgment and retribution, and to kill the fish that are destined to die).” Obviously, the fate of that single fish isn't coincidental, because judgement and coincidence are a contradiction to each other.

The Baal Shem Tov's view of Divine Providence is that it doesn't change the specific being, whether animal, vegetation or inanimate object. Rather, it supervises from above (to determine whether the fish will be snatched up or not). And this explains his view in the purpose of creation: if there is Divine supervision over every single creation, there is clearly a purpose in its creation as well.

This is one of the only topics – whether all creations have purpose or not – in which the “Genuis of Rogotchover”<sup>9</sup> argues against the opinion of the Rambam.

4) See Keser Shem Tov, hosafos part 179 and on.

5) See Igros Kodesh vol. 1 pg. 169.

6) Toras Menachem vol. 52 pg. 346.

7) Tractate Chulin 63a (and in Rashi's commentary).

8) Psalms 36:7.

9) Tzafnas Paneach on Moreh Nevuchim.

He maintains that even worms which emerge from rotting fruit – which are permitted to be killed on Shabbos – are created with a purpose, and he applies various proofs from the revealed part of Torah as well.

## Personal Divine Providence

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This serves as a lesson to each of us:

A person might only see value in his prayer and Torah study each morning, or in his charitable donations at the end of the day. He might think that only they have “Divine Providence,” only they have unique purpose, and that he will be rewarded specifically for those deeds [especially if he gives charity happily, because then he is blessed with eleven blessings<sup>10</sup>]. However, all other engagements like engaging in commerce seem to be an unavoidable nuisance; he must engage in commerce in order to give charity, so his business is only a conduit for the real Mitzvah – giving charity.

So the Baal Shem Tov teaches us that there is Divine Providence in every creation, and all the more so, in every element of the life of a human being. Indeed, the ultimate goal is to give charity, pray and study Torah, but all other engagements have purpose as well, for there is Divine Providence at every step and detail. At every moment of the day, “G-d stands above you and inspects your deepest recesses to see whether you serve Him (and not simply serve Him, but serve Him) properly (as stated in Tanya)<sup>11</sup>. Thus, even something that is a conduit to a Mitzvah has a unique purpose of its own.

Second day of Shevuos 5728  
Toras Menachem 5728 vol. 3 pg. 47.

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10) Tractate Bava Batra 9b.

11) Chapter 41.

# Sources:

## Source 1

Guide to the Perplexed, volume 3, chapter 17

I believe that Divine Providence does not extend to the individual members of species except in the case of mankind. It is only in this species that the incidents in the existence of the individual beings, their good and evil fortunes, are the result of justice, in accordance with the words, "For all His ways are judgment." But I agree with Aristotle as regards all other living beings, and à fortiori as regards plants and all the rest of earthly creatures. For I do not believe that it is through the interference of Divine Providence that a certain leaf drops [from a tree], nor do I hold that when a certain spider catches a certain fly, that this is the direct result of a special decree and will of Hashem in that moment; it is not by a particular Divine decree that the spittle of a certain person moved, fell on a certain gnat in a certain place, and killed it; nor is it by the direct will of Hashem that a certain fish catches and swallows a certain worm on the surface of the water. In all these cases the action is, according to my opinion, entirely due to chance, as taught by Aristotle.

## Source 2

Keter Shem Tov - hosafos 177

Our master the Baal Shem Tov taught regarding Divine Providence that all movements of all creatures occur with the detailed guidance from the Creator,

## מקור 1

מורה נבוכים חלק ג' פרק י"ז

והוא שאני אאמין שההשגחה האלוקית אמנם היא ... באישי מין האדם לבד, וזה המין לבדו הוא אשר כל עניני אישיו, ומה ששיגם מטוב או רע, נמשך אחר הדין, כמו שאמר "כי כל דרכיו משפט"; אבל שאר בעלי החיים, וכל שכן הצמחים וזולתם, דעתי בהם דעת אריסטו. לא אאמין כלל שזה העלה נפל בהשגחה בו, ולא שזה העכביש טרף זה הזבוב בגזרה מאת האלוה ורצונו האישי עתה, ולא שהרוק אשר רקק אותו ראובן התנועע עד שנפל על זה היתוש במקום מיוחד והרגו בגזרת האלוה, ולא שזה הדג חטף ובלע זאת התולעת מעל פני המים ברצון אלוקי אישי, אבל אלה כולם אצלי במקרה גמור כמו שחושב אריסטו.

## מקור 2

כתר שם טוב הוספות סימן קע"ט

וכידוע בענין השגחה פרטית שמבאר מורנו הבעל שם-טוב נ"ע דלא זו לבד דכל פרטי תנועות הנבראים למיניהם היא בהשגחה

and this detailed Divine Providence is the life-source of the creature and its source of existence. And moreover: each movement of each creation has a profound purpose, and is intrinsically bound to the wider purpose of creation.

For example, there may be a single movement of a blade of grass growing in the forest or on a tall mountain or in a deep valley where no person has visited. Yet each movement to its right or to its left or forward or backward throughout the span of its existence is determined by Divine Providence of Hashem's command, that this specific blade of grass should live a specific amount of months, days and hours, and during its lifetime it should wave to the right, left, forward and backward in this specific pattern. Moreover: the detailed movements of this blade of grass are linked to the general purpose of creation.

פרטית מהבורא ית', והשגחה פרטית הלזו היא חיות הנברא וקיומו, אלא דעוד זאת, דתנועה פרטית דנברא פרטי הרי יש לו יחס כללי לכללות כונת הבריאה.

ועל דרך דוגמא הנה תנועת אחד הדשאים הצומח בעמקי יער, או באחד ההרים הגבוהים, או בעמקים היותר עמוקים, אשר לא עבר שם איש, הנה לא זו בלבד דתנועת הדשא ההוא לימינו ולשמאלו לפניו ולאחור בכל משך ימי חייו הוא עפ"י השגחה פרטית, אשר הוא ית' גזר אומר, אשר דשא פרטי זה חי' יחי' חדשים ימים ושעות קצובות, ובמשך זה יסוב ויכוף לימינו ושמאלו לפניו ולאחוריו במספר כזה וכזה, אלא עוד זאת דתנועת הדשא הפרטי הלזה יש לו יחס כללי לכללות כונת הבריאה...

### Source 3

Talmud, Tractate Chulin 63a

“When Rabbi Yochanan would see a *shalach* bird [scooping fish out of the sea], he would say: “Your judgments are [even in] the great deep.”

Rashi:

For you orchestrate the arrival of the *shalach* to carry out your judgment and retribution, and to kill the fish that are destined to die.”

### מקור 3

מסכת חולין, דף ס"ג עמוד א'

“ר' יוחנן כי הוה חזי שלך (עוף “השולה דגים מן הים”) אמר משפטיך תהום רבה.”

פירוש רש"י:

“שזמנתה שלך לשפוט ולעשות נקמתך בדגת הים להמית המזומנים למות”

Tzemach Tzedek – Yahel Or on Psalms pg. 132

Based on this, my grandfather [Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi] would respond to those who claimed that Divine Providence pertains only to humans – for the fate of fish is also Divinely ordained.

## Source 4

Lubavitcher Rebbe – Lekutei Sichos vol. 30 pg. 150

We've often brought a simple example from our lives: A successful homemaker doesn't only manage her home well, ensuring that every item has a specific place and purpose. She also ensures that every item is integral to the overall theme of the home – that everything is exact, with nothing lacking and nothing unnecessary (which doesn't serve the purpose of the home).

If this is so in the life of a literal homemaker, how much more so – and infinitely so – with the Creator and Director of the universe. No doubt, everything that takes place in G-d's creations are with Him direct supervision, and moreover, each creation is integral to the overall purpose of creation.

הצמח צדק יהל אור על תהלים עמ' קלב

ומכאן הביא סבי (אדמו"ר הזקן) נ"ע, תשובה לדברי האומרים שהשגחה פרטית אינו רק במין האדם, שהרי אף הדגים מושגחים.

## מקור 4

הרבי מליובאוויטש - לקוטי שיחות חלק ל' עמוד 150

וכמדובר כמ"פ דוגמא פשוטה לזה בחיי האדם: דרכה של אשת חיל, עקרת בית מוצלחת היא, שנוסף על שהיא מפקחת היטב על כל פרטי הדברים הנמצאים בביתה, שכל דבר נמצא במקומו הראוי לו והכל מתנהג בסדר מדויק הנה עוד זאת, שכל פרטי חפצי ביתה יש להם חלק במטרה הכללית של הנהגת הבית, עד שהכל הוא בחשבון ובדיוק באופן דלא חסר ולא יתר לא חסר משהו להנהגת הבית ואין דבר מיותר (שאינו משמש למטרה זו).

ואם כן הדבר בחיי עקרת בית פשוטה עאכ"כ להבדיל הבדלות עד אין קץ אצל בורא העולם ומנהיגו, שנוסף שכל פרטי המאורעות של כל הנבראים שבעולמו של הקב"ה הם ע"פ השגחתו ית', הנה כל אחד מהם נוגע להשלמת הכוונה העליונה בענין הבריאה

## Source 5

Lubavitcher Rebbe – 15 Shevat 5732

My father-in-law, the [previous] Rebbe, once went on a walk with his father, the Rebbe Rashab. During their walk, his father spoke about the concept of Divine Providence. As they strolled, while listening closely to his father, he absentmindedly pulled a leaf off a tree, tore it up between his fingers and scattered it in the wind.

His father turned to him and said:

“How could you be so careless about a creation of G-d? The leaf was created by G-d for a specific purpose; it contains G-dly life and energy. Why is his identity worth less than yours?”

## מקור 5

הרבי מליובאוויטש - שיחת ט"ו בשבט תשל"ב

פעם הלך כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר לטייל עם אביו, הרבי הרש"ב, ובעת הטיול דיבר אביו אודות השגחה פרטית. תוך כדי ההליכה, בהיותו שקוע בדברי אביו, קטף עלה מן העץ, מולל אותו באצבעותיו ופיזרו לרוח.

פנה אליו אביו ואמר:

כיצד יכולים להיות שוה-נפש כל-כך לבריאתו של הקב"ה? את העלה ברא הקב"ה לשם כוונה מסויימת; יש בו גוף וחיות אלקית. במה ה"אני" שלו קטן יותר מה"אני" שלך? ...



## Source 6

A Story of Rebbetzin Schneerson, Told by Chessed Halberstam

**Note:** Chessed Halberstam worked in the employ of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, for eighteen years—from 1970 until the Rebbetzin’s passing in 1988—performing household tasks and serving as the Rebbetzin’s driver.

I was once driving the Rebbetzin to a certain destination when we found our regular route closed off due to road work and were forced to proceed instead on a parallel street. As we drove along that street, we heard the sound of a woman screaming in Russian. When I stopped at the next traffic light, the Rebbetzin turned to me and said: “I heard a woman screaming. Can you go back and see what that was about?”

We drove back to the beginning of the street. There we saw a woman standing on the curb and weeping, while near her, workers were carrying furniture and household items from a house and loading them on to a truck belonging to the county marshal. At the Rebbetzin’s request, I parked behind the marshal’s truck and went to learn the details of what was going on. The marshal explained that the woman had not paid her rent for many months, and was now being evicted from her home.

When I reported back to the Rebbetzin, she asked me to go back and inquire from the marshal how much the woman owed, and if he would accept a personal check; she also asked that I should not say anything to the family being evicted. At this point, I still did not realize where all this was leading, but I fulfilled the Rebbetzin’s request. The sum that the family owed was approximately \$6,700. The marshal said that he had no problem accepting a personal check, as long as he confirms with the bank that the check is covered; he also said that if he received the payment, his men would carry everything back into the house. When I informed the Rebbetzin of the details, she took out her checkbook and, to my amazement, wrote out a check for the full amount, and asked me to give it to the marshal.

The marshal made a phone call to the bank, and then instructed his workers to take everything back into the house. The Rebbetzin immediately urged me to quickly drive away, before the woman realized what had transpired.

I was completely amazed at what I had seen. Later, when we were in the park, I could not contain myself, and asked the Rebbetzin what had prompted her to give such a large sum to a total stranger.

“Do you really want to know?” asked the Rebbetzin.

“Yes, I do,” I replied.

“Then I’ll tell you,” she said. “Once, when I was a young girl, my father took me for a walk in the park. He sat me down on a bench, and started to tell me about the idea of Hashgachah Peratit (specific divine providence). Every time—said Father—when something causes us to deviate from our normal routine, there is a divinely ordained reason for this; every time we see something unusual, there is a purpose in why we’ve been shown this sight.

“Today,” continued the Rebbetzin, “when I saw the ‘Detour’ sign instructing us to deviate from our regular route, I remembered my father’s words, and immediately thought to myself: Every day we drive by this street; suddenly the street’s closed off, and we’re sent to a different street. What is the purpose of this? How is this connected to me? Then I heard the sound of a woman crying and screaming. I realized that we had been sent along this route for a purpose.”

(<https://www.chabad.org/156251>)

## Source 7

A song of Rabbi Yom-Tov Ehrlich, translated to English

A tree stands, tall and high,  
Branches reaching for the sky;  
A little leaf, without a sound  
A tzaddik who is passing by  
Stops and asks the little leaf, Why?  
What made you drop from your  
abode  
And lie here in the road?

I am not the authority  
The twig I was on gave a sudden  
shake  
It was more than I could take.  
Twig, twig, O authority,  
Perhaps you can explain to me  
Why you gave a sudden shake,  
More than the leaf could take?

I am not the authority;  
The wind gave a sudden whoosh  
And blew the little leaf loose.  
Wind, wind, O authority,  
Perhaps you can explain to me,  
Why you gave a sudden whoosh  
And blew the little leaf loose?

I am not the authority;  
My angel told me what to do,  
So with all my might I blew.  
Angel, angel, O authority,  
Perhaps you can explain to me,  
Why you told the wind what to do,  
And mightily it blew?

I am not the authority;  
The Creator of me and you  
Told me what to do.  
Creator, Creator, O Authority,  
Perhaps you can explain to me,  
Why the little leaf is shaken free  
And falls down from its tree?

The Creator reveals His inner plan  
And makes it known to man;  
Take the little leaf in your hand,  
And you will understand.  
See the worm lying there,  
He was suffering and in despair,  
He was up there on the tree  
Breathing heavily,  
The rays of the sun were so intense  
His discomfort was immense.

The sun is roasting me!  
So I commanded the angel right  
away  
To send the wind along its way  
And the twig began to sway  
And the little leaf was torn away,  
And so the sequence was complete,  
Shielding the worm from burning  
heat,  
And for the tiny worm,  
Sleep was never so sweet

