



**JEWISH
SCHOLARS
PROGRAM**

Divine Providence

Where is G-d in Our Lives?



DIVINE PROVIDENCE

WHERE IS G-D IN OUR LIVES?

SETTING THE STAGE :

VOLTAIRE, A TREATISE ON METAPHYSICS (1736)

When I see a watch with a hand marking the hours, I conclude that an intelligent being has designed the springs of this mechanism, so that the hand would mark the hours. So, when I see the springs of the human body, I conclude that an intelligent being has designed these organs to be received and nourished within the womb for nine months; for eyes to be given for seeing; hands for grasping, and so on. But from this one argument, I cannot conclude anything more, except that it is probable that an intelligent and superior being has prepared and shaped matter with dexterity; I cannot conclude from this argument alone that this being has made the matter out of nothing or that he is infinite in any sense.

THE G-D-HEAD, WWW.THE-NEW-WAY.ORG

Deism (from Latin deus 'god') is the belief in the existence of a supreme being, specifically of a creator who does not intervene in the universe. Deism is based on nature and reason.

Deists are ready to acknowledge a Creator. In order to account for the existence of the material world, it is necessary to assume the existence of a First Cause, at whose command creation took effect and the cosmos entered on its life... The heavens are the work of His hands, just as the watch is the work of the watchmaker. As the craftsman determines the characteristic properties of his machine, the correlation of its parts, their positions and their functions, so is G-d conceived to have dealt with the world. He brought it into being and ordained its laws.

He imparted to it once of all the energy which serves as the driving power of the stupendous mechanism. In other words, according to Deists, G-d left Nature to work itself out in obedience to laws originally given. Deists, therefore, deny the possibility of occasional interferences on the part of G-d. In other words, they believe neither that G-d takes care for the universe nor that He can do miracles.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

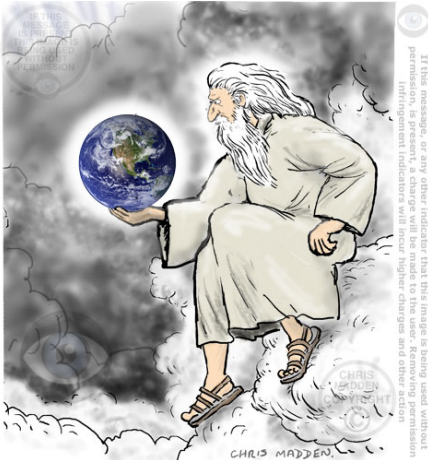
- ❖ DO YOU THINK G-D IS INVOLVED IN EVERYDAY AFFAIRS?
 - ❖ WHY SHOULD IT MATTER IF G-D IS OR IS NOT INVOLVED IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES?
-

ENGAGING THE TEXT: DO WE BELIEVE G-D IS STILL INVOLVED?

TEHILLIM (PSALMS) 113:5-6

מי כה' אלקינו המגביהי לשבת,
המשפילי לראות בשמים ובארץ?

Who is like the Lord, our G-d, Who dwells on high, Who lowers [His eyes] to look in the heavens and the earth?



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RABBI CHAIM FRIEDLANDER, EMUNAH V'HASHGACHAH, PG. 9

The word “providence/supervision” includes two facets. The first is to observe the object of supervision in order to assess the matter and understand what is going on with it. The second aspect is a result of the first, namely to decide how to respond and what to do with the observations. G-d’s supervision is no different; it also has these two aspects. Firstly, G-d watches us, since He sees and knows all, as the verse says, “The Lord looked from heaven; He saw all the people” (Tehillim 33:13). Secondly, based on G-d’s observations and knowledge, He acts toward us and for us. Thus, providence has two aspects: awareness and response.

RABBI CHAIM VOLOZHINER, NEFESH HACHAIM, SHAAR 1, CHAPTER 2

The reason G-d is referred to as being “all-powerful” is that the ways of G-d are not like those of flesh and blood. For when a person builds a house out of wood, he does not create the wood of his own ability. He just buys the wood that has already been created and assembles it into a building. Once he has completed it according to plan, he leaves it as it is, and it continues to exist. Not so for G-d. In His infinite power, He created this world out of nothing. And ever since creation, the world only continues to exist every day and every single second by virtue of the Divine force and pristine radiance infused into it according to His will. Were G-d to remove the force of His influence for even a second, it would all cease to exist. This is in line with the morning “Yotzer Ohr” prayer established by the Men of the Great Assembly: “He continually renews His creation each day, constantly.” That is, literally “constantly,” every instant and every second....



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ❖ HAVE YOU EVER FELT G-D WAS WATCHING YOU?
 - ❖ WHY SHOULD G-D NEED TO RECREATE THE WORLD EVERY SECOND?
-

ENGAGING THE TEXT: INDIVIDUAL PROVIDENCE

BEREISHIT (GENESIS) RABBAH 10:7

Every single blade of grass has a spiritual force appointed over it, which strikes it and tells it: "Grow!"

TALMUD CHULIN 7B

Rabbi Chanina taught: No person bangs his finger below unless it is announced Above, as the verse states, "A man's steps are prepared by G-d" (Tehillim 37:23) and "A person must understand his way" (Mishlei/Proverbs 20:24).



RABBI NOACH WEINBERG, HOW TO GET YOUR PRAYERS ANSWERED, WWW.AISH.COM

A young man came into Aish HaTorah to meet with me. "Rabbi," he said, "I've got news for you. I don't need a yeshiva. You see, G-d and I are very close. G-d does miracles for me."

I looked at him a little suspiciously. "Would you mind illustrating a miracle or two?"

"Sure. Once I was riding my motorcycle up a winding mountain road. A truck came around a curve and swerved into my lane. My only choice was to either smash into the side of the mountain, or to go off the cliff. Next thing I know, I'm flying through the air with nothing but rocks beneath me. I screamed out, 'G-d! Help!'

"I hit the ground, and it was a miracle. My bike landed between two rocks, which acted like shock absorbers and cushioned the impact. I was gently tossed off my bike into a hedge of bushes. I didn't get a scratch! So you see, G-d does miracles for me."

I looked at him and said, "Tell me, my friend. Who do you think pushed you off the cliff?!"

G-d is not Superman. He doesn't wait until you stumble off a cliff so He can fly in at the last moment to save you. He controls everything in your life: the troubles and the solutions. Don't wait for G-d to push you off a cliff and catch you.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

❖ DO YOU THINK G-D CARES ABOUT EVERY DETAIL OF YOUR WORLD?

ENGAGING THE TEXT: STRENGTHENING THE CONNECTION

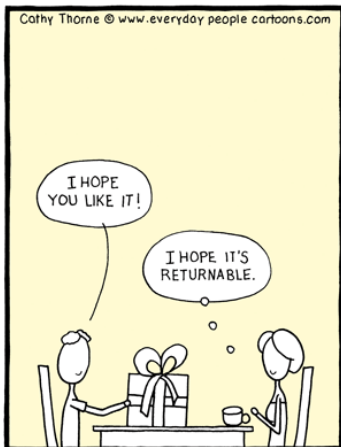
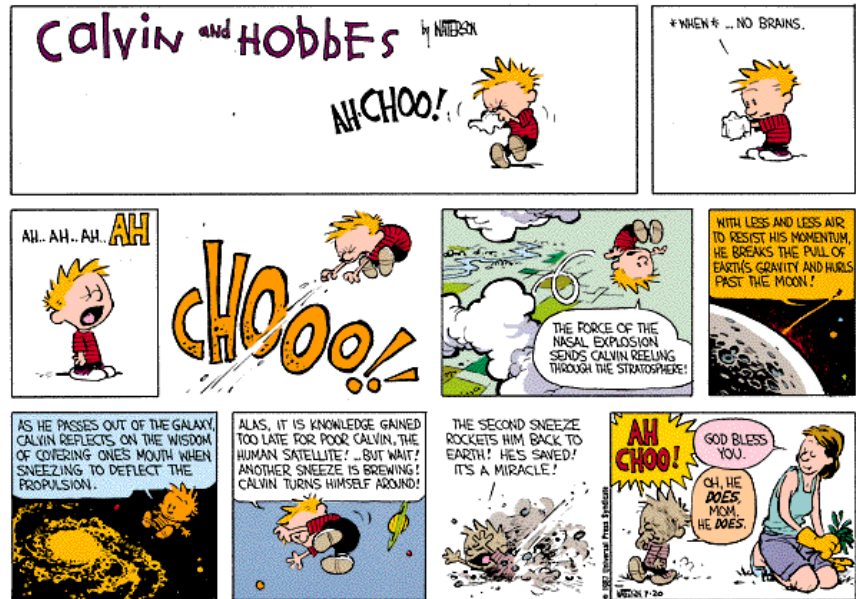
RABBI CHAIM FRIEDLANDER, SIFSEI CHAIM, MOADIM, VOL. II, PG. 323

When we are disconnected from G-d and are unaware of Him, then G-d does not show His providence. It appears as if the hand of nature rules over us.

To the degree that we strengthen our belief in His providence, that is how much we will merit the manifestation of His special providence over us.

RABBI ARYEH KAPLAN,
HANDBOOK OF JEWISH
THOUGHT, VOL. II, 19:39-43

Though a person's total lifespan is determined by heredity and environment, his days are largely predetermined from the time of his conception, and perhaps even generations earlier. However, a person's days may be increased because of great merit, or decreased because of sin. Every life that is taken by G-d is taken in judgment [Berachot 46b] according to what will do him the most spiritual good [Bereishit Rabbah 62:5].



RABBI YOSEF TZVI SALANT, BE'ER YOSEF, PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

Since an item is directed to its owner by Heaven, the item is appropriate and carefully measured for the needs of its owner. Therefore, the righteous know to value and appreciate everything that comes into their possession, whether big or small, because it is through Divine providence from Heaven that this item belongs to them. And certainly this object is necessary for them to help them actualize their potential. Therefore, the righteous do not spare any trouble or effort to prevent the loss of any their possessions.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ❖ WHY SHOULD SOME THINGS BE PREDETERMINED, WHILE OTHERS ARE DEPENDENT ON OUR ACTIONS?

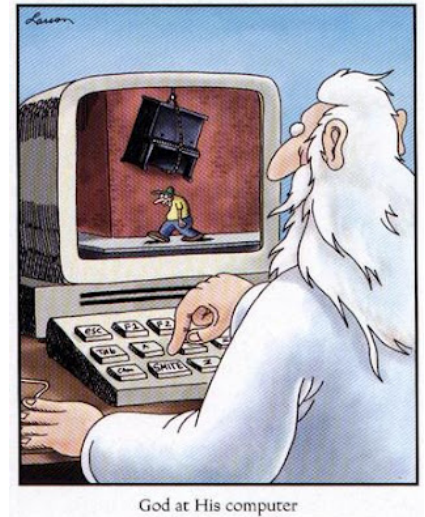
ENGAGING THE TEXT: SPECIAL ATTENTION

RAMCHAL (RABBI MOSHE CHAIM LUZZATTO), MAAMAR HA-IKARIM, PEREK HA-HASHGACHAH

The providence which applies to the rest of the animal kingdom is only for the sake of perpetuating the species within the boundaries set by the will of G-d. G-d supervises each and every species to the extent of providing for the species. But He does not relate to them personally, for their purpose in creation is fulfilled as a general species.

...

Since mankind has been singled out for reward and punishment according to their actions, therefore the providence that applies to them is of a different sort than that of other species... Humans are not just given their due based on their membership in the species, but are supervised independently on an individual basis. Their actions are judged individually and G-d makes appropriate decrees upon them as individuals.



RAMBAN (NACHMANIDES), DEVARIM (DEUTERONOMY) 11:13

You should know that miracles are performed, whether for the good or for the bad, only for the completely righteous or the completely wicked. However, as regards ordinary people, the way of the world orchestrates for them good or bad according to their actions.



RASHI'S COMMENTARY TO TALMUD SHABBAT 156A

The Jewish people are not bound by fortune – because by virtue of prayer or spiritual merit, fortune can be improved.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ❖ WHY SHOULD HUMANS GET ANY BETTER ATTENTION THAN ANIMALS?
 - ❖ WHY SHOULD THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE ANY DIFFERENT TREATMENT THAN THE REST OF THE WORLD?
-



KNOW HOW TO ANSWER

RABBI AHARON OF BARCELONA, SEFER HACHINUCH, 546

G-d supervises each individual and He knows all their deeds, as well as all that happens to them – both the good and the bad results of His decree – according to their merit or liability, as our Sages say (Chullin 7b): No one bangs his finger unless it has been so decreed in Heaven. Nevertheless, each person must protect himself from accidents that occur in the world. That is because G-d created the world and built it on the foundations of nature. He decreed that fire burn and water extinguish the blaze. Similarly, He decreed that if a large rock should fall on a person's head, it will crush his skull; or if he falls off a tall building, he will die. G-d created the body of man and breathed into him a soul, his conscious awareness with which he can guard himself against harm, and He placed both of them within the domain of natural processes which both guide and activate them. Thus, G-d placed the physical human body within the realm of physical nature – as His wisdom saw fit. Consequently, He commanded man to guard himself from accidents. That is because nature – which he is part of – will do things to him if he doesn't take precautions to watch himself.



RABBI PAYSACH KROHN, THE MAGGID SPEAKS, PG. 224

Rabbi Asher Fleishman (the name has been changed) traveled throughout the world for the benefit of his yeshivah. During one of his trips to New York, he suddenly became ill. Because of a heart condition, he always carried his New York doctor's phone number with him in case of emergency. The very sharp chest pains that he felt made him realize that he had to get medical attention at once. Weak, and with a cold sweat, he mustered enough energy to reach for the phone and dial the number from his telephone book. He prayed that the line would not be busy. After a second ring a woman picked up. "Hello?" "Is Dr. Miller there? This is Rabbi Fleishman," he said in a low, strained tone. "Yes," the woman said in surprise. "The doctor happens to be here. I'll call him." Told who it was, the doctor ran to the phone to see if the rabbi was alright. R' Asher described his pains and the doctor assured he would be over in a few moments. "But how did you know that I was here?" the doctor asked. "I didn't tell anyone where I was going."

"You're not in your office?" asked the surprised R' Asher.

"No. I'm on an emergency call a few blocks from home. Not even my wife knows where I am. I said nothing to her because I thought I'd be right back."

"I just dialed your regular number," the incredulous R' Asher insisted. Then the doctor looked down at the phone from which he was speaking. The numbers were precisely the same as his office phone except for one, in which the number was one digit off. By inadvertently dialing one of the numbers incorrectly, R' Asher had actually dialed the "right" number! Later, after having been taken to hospital, the rabbi was told that his life had been saved only because he had reached the doctor in time.

Wrong number, right party – an overt lesson in Divine providence and a person's lifespan.

ROLE PLAY

Someone approaches you and says, "I don't believe that G-d really cares about every little action that I do. Why does it matter what I do at any given moment?"

What do you respond?