
HASHGACHAH PRATIT

∞ DIVINE PROVIDENCE I ∞

The Nature and Dynamics of Hashgachah Pratit

Hashgachah Pratit, or Divine Providence, is one of those principles that people tend to either believe in entirely or not at all. Some feel that every single little episode in life has meaning, because God ordained it, while others claim that there is no such thing as Providence, and therefore everything is random.

Judaism affirms the belief in Divine Providence. In fact, it counts amongst its fundamentals of faith the belief in God's omniscience (that He knows everything) and that He rewards and punishes us based on our actions. But the Jewish concept of Hashgacha Pratit is anything but simplistic. In other words, we cannot know for certain why any particular thing happens to any particular person, but we can attempt to understand the general principles by which God runs the world. Divine Providence is one of the precepts that can help us make sense of the world, although it is not the only one. This class by its very nature intersects with many other topics covered in the Morasha Syllabus, such as Free Will, *Teshuva* (repentance), Toward Understanding Suffering & Adversity, Taking Responsibility (*Sechar V'Onesh* – Reward and Punishment), and The World to Come. We therefore refer both teachers and students to these other classes to gain a fuller picture of God's Master Plan.

Two Morasha shiurim address Hashgachah. This first class investigates the nature of Divine Providence and how it applies both generally to the cosmos and specifically to mankind. The second class deals more personally with how Divine Providence manifests itself in our own lives.

Some questions we will address in this class:

- ∞ What does "Divine Providence" really mean?
- ∞ Does God really care about animals and insects? Does my dog have Divine Providence too?
- ∞ Are there different degrees of Divine Providence among people, or is everyone the same?
- ∞ Does being the Chosen Nation mean that we have a special measure of Divine Providence?

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INTRODUCTION: PLAYING GOD

The Problem:

You are given an island where several tribes live. By nature and culture, these tribes are exploitative and belligerent. This results in much suffering on the island, caused by war, poverty and prejudice. They have been living this way for centuries without any sign of improvement.

Your Assignment:

To try to improve this society. To teach its members to live together in harmony and reduce suffering to a minimum or eliminate it entirely. To create a healthy society.

Your Resources:

You have all the resources that highly advanced technology can offer. You have the entire island under surveillance and can see what is happening in any place at any time. You have such devices as cloud-seeding equipment and can plant underground explosives. Within reason, you can control weather, flooding, volcanoes and earthquakes, and produce any "natural" phenomenon on cue. You also have devices that can be used to implant ideas through subliminal suggestion. You can implant ideas to entire populations or to certain select leaders. However, you must take into account the severe limitations of subliminal suggestion. If you try to implant any ideas that go against the basic nature of the populace, they will be totally rejected and your efforts will be in vain. One alternative would be to implant ideas that somehow would make use of the acknowledged bad nature of these people.

Your Restrictions:

Under no circumstances are the natives of this island to be aware of your presence. This supersedes all other considerations. The cultural shock caused by your revealing yourself would disrupt the entire fabric of the island culture. It would cause much suffering and more than offset any good that you could possibly accomplish. The natives would be reduced to a state of almost vegetable-like dependence from which they would be unlikely to recover. If they did recover, they might rebel so violently as to eliminate any positive values they might have originally had. Therefore, the restriction that you not reveal yourself must be followed without exception under any circumstances. But aside from this restriction, you have a free hand to proceed as you see fit.

In short, you have the opportunity to play God. What would you do? (From Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, "If You Were God")

God doesn't just play God; He is God. And He faces a challenge not unlike the scenario depicted above. He created the world in order to give to mankind, providing us the opportunity to develop our spirituality through the willful refinement of our own character. But it must be willful, the product of own free choice. For God to blatantly reveal Himself to us would deny us our free will and undermine the purpose of the entire creation. He has all the powers of nature and thought at His disposal, but to those who cannot fathom His existence, He must remain for the most part behind the scenes. God's medium for advancing His objective of giving to mankind is called *Hashgachah*, Divine Providence. Sometimes more subtle and sometimes more overt, Divine Providence is God's way of guiding us toward the purpose for which we were created.

SECTION I. WHAT IS HASHGACHAH?

God created the world as a perfect place to fulfill His purpose, with all of nature under His command. As the omnipotent and omniscient ruler of the universe, He extends His providence to all existence, overseeing it and maintaining it in order to fulfill His ultimate purpose. Even when God does not miraculously intervene in worldly happenings, so they seem to be products of the laws of nature or accidents, or as a result of man's free will, all occurrences ultimately result from God's will.

PART A. AWARENESS AND RESPONSE

1. **Tehillim (Psalms) 113:5-6 – God sees all.**

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

מי כיקוק אלקינו המגביה לשבת: המשפילי לראות בשמים ובארץ:

Divine Providence is defined both as God's *awareness* of every detail of Creation – including each person's behavior and innermost thoughts and feelings – and His *personal involvement and relationship* with us, as based on who we are and what we're doing with our lives.

2. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Emunah v'Hashgachah, p. 9 – There are two aspects to providence: awareness and response.**

The word "supervision" includes two facets. The first is to observe the object of supervision in

"השגחה" כוללת בקרבה שני חלקים. החלק האחד הוא: להסתכל על הדבר המושגח כדי להתרשם ולהבין

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.

God's supervision is no different; it also has these two aspects. Firstly, God 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 God's observations and knowledge, He acts toward us and for us.

Thus, providence has two aspects: awareness and response.

את המתרחש בו ואתו. והחלק השני הוא תוצאת החלק הראשון, דהיינו, איך מגיבים ומה פועלים לפי מה שרואים.

גם בהשגחת הקב"ה יש שני חלקים. ראשית, הקב"ה מביט עלינו והוא רואה ויודע את הכל, ככתוב (תהילים לג, יג) "משמים הביט ה', ראה את כל בני האדם". ושנית, לפי מה שהקב"ה רואה ויודע הוא פועל בנו ובשבילנו.

נמצינו למדים: "השגחה" היינו: א. ראית הדבר ב. והפעולה בו.

3. **Rambam (Maimonides), Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1 – It is a fundamental of Jewish belief that God both knows what we do and responds to our actions.**

The tenth principle is that God knows the actions of mankind *and* does not ignore them, unlike those who say that "God has abandoned the world."

והיסוד העשירי שהוא יתעלה יודע מעשה בני אדם ולא הזניחם, ולא כדעת האומר עזב ה' את הארץ.

PART B. GOD CONTINUALLY CREATES AND SUSTAINS THE WORLD

It is axiomatic to the Jewish faith that God is both omnipotent and omniscient – i.e., He both knows and controls everything that occurs in the world. There is nothing that takes place in the world that God does not will.

1. **Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah (The Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah) 2:9 – Every entity in the natural world is sustained directly by God.**

All of the entities of the world...from the primordial form to the smallest insect in the center of the earth – everything exists from the power of the reality of His absolute existence.

כל הנמצאים... מצורה הראשונה עד יתוש קטן שיהיה בטבור הארץ הכל מכח אמתתו נמצאו.

People like to ask, "Can God create a rock too heavy for Himself to lift?" as if the question somehow proves that God has limitations. Just the opposite! What it proves is that God's only limitation is that He cannot be limited. Another such "limitation" that comes by virtue of God's infinite power is that He cannot remove His awareness from His creation, for if He did it would cease to exist.

2. **Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar 1, Chapter 2 – The world only exists by virtue of God's continual will for it to do so.**

The reason God is referred to as being "all-powerful" is that the ways of God are not like those of flesh and blood. For when a person

וענין מה שהוא ית' נקרא "בעל הכחות", כי לא כמדת בשר ודם - מדת הקדוש ברוך הוא. כי האדם כשבונה

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 God. 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 God 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...

בנין דרך משל מעץ, אין הבונה בורא וממציא אז מכחו העץ, רק שלוקח עצים שכבר נבראו ומסדרם בבנין, ואחר שכבר סדרם לפי רצונו, עם שכחו הוסר ונסתלק מהם, עם כל זה הבנין קיים.

אבל הוא ית"ש, כמו בעת בריאת העולמות כולם בראם והמציאם הוא ית' יש מאין בכחו הבלתי תכלית, כן מאז כל יום וכל רגע ממש, כל כח מציאותם וסדרם וקיומם תלוי רק במה שהוא ית"ש משפיע בהם ברצונו ית' כל רגע, כח ושפעת אור חדש, ואלו היה הוא ית' מסלק מהם כח השפעתו אף רגע אחת, כרגע היו כולם לאפס ותוהו. וכמו שיסדו אנשי כנסת הגדולה בברכת יוצר אור "המחדש בטובו בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית", היינו תמיד ממש כל עת ורגע...

3. **Rabbi Chaim Freidlander, Siftei Chaim, Emunah V'Hashgacha, Volume 1, p. 15 – We must meditate on the fact that everything is an expression of God's will.**

At each and every second, God, by virtue of His will, causes the entire creation to exist, from the smallest creature to the biggest. So when we see a little fly alive and fluttering around, we should meditate and think to ourselves that right now God is granting it life and the ability to move. Likewise, people live and function at each instant only because God makes it so at each moment.

הקב"ה ברצונו מהווה ומפעיל בכל רגע מחדש את כל סוגי הנבראים מהבריה הקטנה ביותר עד הנברא הגדול ביותר. וכאשר אנו רואים זבוב קטן חי ומתנוועע, עלינו להתבונן ולשים אל לבנו שהקב"ה עכשיו נותן לו חיים ומנוועע אותו. נמצא שהאדם קיים ופועל בכל רגע רק מכיון שהקב"ה מפעיל אותו בכל רגע.

So far we have established as axiomatic that God knows all the dealings of everything that exists in His creation. The remainder of the class will focus on the other aspect of providence: how God guides the world in response to His knowledge of it.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I.

- ⌘ Providence has two aspects to it. Firstly, it implies that God is constantly aware of what goes on in His creation. Secondly, it means that God deals with His creation based on the knowledge that He has of it.
- ⌘ God's creation does not exist independently of Him; it only continues to exist because He constantly wills it to do so. Therefore, God's knowledge of the world – the first aspect of providence – is intrinsic to His nature as the Creator of the world.
- ⌘ Since the world only exists as a manifestation of God's will, nothing happens here that is not in accordance with His will.

SECTION II. TWO TYPES OF HASHGACHAH: GENERAL AND SPECIFIC

Providence is built upon the basic principle that God creates and sustains all of existence, and directs it toward the fulfillment of its purpose.

1. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Maamar Ha'Ikarim, Perek Ha'Hashgachah – God guides the world toward the fulfillment of its purpose.**

God constantly supervises His entire creation, giving it existence and guiding it according to the purpose for which He created it.

הנה האדון ב"ה משגיח תמיד על כל בריותיו, ומקיימן ומנהלן כפי התכלית שבעבורה בראן:

2. **Bereishit Rabbah 10:7 – Even every blade of grass is on God's radar.**

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

אין לך כל עשב ועשב שאין לו מזל ברקיע שמכה אותו ואומר לו גדל!

According to many great Jewish thinkers, Divine Providence granted to humankind is fundamentally different from the Divine supervision over other elements of nature. Whereas with regard to man, Divine Providence implies the intimate guidance of individual lives, with regard to other parts of nature, the providence is more general. As such, God manages this world through two kinds of providence: the general and the particular.

PART A. HASHGACHAH KLALIT – DIVINE PROVIDENCE OF A GENERAL SPECIES

Although animals have a measure of free will, they do not have a highly developed intellect and are therefore not responsible for their actions. Still, God has mercy even on animals, as it is written, "God is good to all; His love is on all His works" (Psalms 145:9).

God does not guide the destiny of individual animals the same as He guides mankind. He therefore does not extend the same protection to the beasts as He does to man. It is only entire species of animals that have a destiny decreed by God, Who guides their evolution, maintains their numbers, or decrees their extinction. In general, God has established nature in such a manner that every species is sustained. Regarding this the Psalmist sang, "He provides animals with their food, [sustaining] the young ravens when they cry out" (Psalms 147:9).

This view is expressed by Rambam and has been maintained by many thinkers since.

1. **Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim (Guide for the Perplexed) 3: 17 – God only supervises the animal world on the level of maintaining their species but not directly to individual animals.**

All these passages (in the Prophets) refer to Providence in relation to species, and not in relation to individual animals. The acts of God are as it is enumerated – He provides for every species the necessary food and the means of subsistence. This is clear and plain.

כי אלו כולם השגחה מינית לא אישית, וכאלו הוא מספר פעולותיו בהכינו לכל מין מזונו ההכרחי וחמר עמידתו, וזה מבואר נגלה.

The lack of direct involvement with individual animals is not due to a lack of God's awareness. Even though God's *supervision* of these creatures is less direct, His *awareness* is complete. The reason that God's supervision of the non-human world is general is that these things fulfill the purpose of their existence only as a general species. For instance, there must be cows in the world, but the fate of one cow versus another is inconsequential as long as the species remains intact.

2. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Maamar Ha-Ikarim, Perek Ha-Hashgachah – Animal providence is only towards the species as a whole because they fulfill their function in the world only as a whole.**

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 God. God 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.

וזה כי ההשגחה בשאר המינים היא לקיום המין ההוא באותם החוקים והגבולים שרצהו ית' שמו. והנה ישגיה בפרטי כל מין ומין, למה שמגיע מהם אל כלל המין כלו, אך לא למה שהם אישים, כי הנה אין התכלית בהם אלא לשלימות המין הכללי.

There is an exception to this rule. When the destiny of any living creature is linked to that of a person, it is also individually judged and guided by God. Therefore, when a snake bites a person or a bird is captured by someone, it happens only through God's decree. Similarly, the destinies of domestic animals are linked to their owners, as are all of a person's possessions.

3. **Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary to Tehillim 145:17 – Individual providence extends to non-human entities, but only as they relate to people.**

This is a matter of great confusion among the scholars, for there are those that say that when a lion devours a sheep, or any similar such instance, it is a punishment from God for the devoured. In this vein I have found a statement of our Sages, "When Rabbi Yochanan would cast his nets into the sea to catch fish, he would say, 'Your judgments are as the vast deep' (hence implying that God will judge which fish will be caught). Yet others say that there is no reward or punishment for any creature other than mankind. But we say that other creatures do in fact have reward and punishment, but only insofar as they relate to the dealings of mankind.

וזה מבוכה גדולה בין החכמים, כי מהם אומרים כי כשטורף האריה הכבש והדומה להם, הוא עונש הנטרף מאת האל יתברך. וכדומה לזה מצאתי בדברי רז"ל (חולין סג, א): ר' יוחנן כד הוי חזי שלך ששולה דגים מהים היה אומר (מזמור לו, ז): משפטיך תהום רבה. ומהם אומרים כי אין גמול ועונש בכל מיני החיים אלא לאדם בלבד, ואנחנו נאמר יש גמול ועונש לשאר מיני בעלי חיים בעסק האדם.

PART B. HASHAGACHAH PRATIT – DIVINE PROVIDENCE OF A SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL

God created this planet and all that is on it for the sake of man. As a result, His providence extends to people in a very particular and individual manner. Every deed of a person is weighed, every hair measured, and every bruise counted, leading each one toward the destiny for which he was born.

As the prophet tells us in the next source, man is the center of creation, and God examines the actions of each person and gives him individually-suited life experiences.

1. **Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) 32:17, 19 – Every person's individual providence is influenced by his actions.**

...You made the heavens and the earth with Your great strength and Your outstretched arm, and nothing can be hidden from You...

Great in counsel, mighty in deeds, Your eyes are open to all the ways of men, so You may give every person according to his ways, and according to the consequences of his actions.

...הנה אתה עשית את השמים ואת הארץ בכחך הגדול ובזרעך הנטויה לא יפלא ממך כל דבר...

גדל העצה, ורב העליה אשר עיניך פקחות, על כל דרכי בני אדם, לתת לאיש בדרכיו, וכפרי מעלליו.

2. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Chulin 7b – Everything that happens to a person is decreed from Above.**

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 God" (Tehillim 37:23) and "A person must understand his way" (Mishlei/Proverbs 20:24).

אמר ר' חנינא אין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמטה אלא אם כן מכריזים עליו מלמעלה שנאמר מו' מצעדי גבר כוננו (תהלים ל"ז, כ"ג) ואדם מה יבין דרכו (משלי כ, כ"ד)

3. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Maamar Ha-Ikarim, Maamer Ha-Hashgachah – Humans are judged on an individual basis, for only they are subject to reward and punishment.**

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 God makes appropriate decrees upon them as individuals.

ואמנם בהיות שניתחד המין האנושי להיות בו השכר והעונש כפי מעשיו וכמ"ש למעלה, גם ההשגחה בו משונה מההשגחה בשאר המינים... אמנם המין האנושי, כל איש ואיש ממנו מלבד מה שמגיע ממנו אל כללות המין, הנה יושגח ביחוד על מה שהוא בפני עצמו, וידונו מעשיו כולם ביחוד ויגזרו עליו גזירות ביחוד, כפי פרטות ענינו:

The fact that God's supervision of humanity comes as a response to human deeds elevates God's Providence of man over His providence of the rest of the universe.

4. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Derech Hashem, Part II, Chapter 1:3 – Divine Providence over human beings is unique in that it comes as a response to choices they make.**

The human race, however, is different from all other species, since it was given free will and the ability to attain either perfection or deficiency. Man is therefore a proactive, moving influence, and not merely passive. The Providence dealing with man must therefore also be different from that concerning other species. In the case of man, [Providence] must oversee and scrutinize every detail of his activities, and produce consequences

ואמנם בהיות שנשתנה המין האנושי מכל שאר המינים – שניתנה לו הבחירה והיכולת במה שהוא לו קנית שלימות או חסרון – ונמצא בבחינה זו פועל ומניע, ולא נפעל – גם ההשגחה עליו, מוכרח שתשתנה מההשגחה על שאר המינים, כי הנה יצטרך להשיגח ולהשקיף על פרטי מעשיו, להמציא לו כדרכיו וכפרי מעלליו, ונמצא שיושגחו מעשיו כולם ותולדותיהם, וישוב ויושגח עליו כפי הראוי לתולדות המעשים ההם, בפרט, ומדה כנגד מדה, וכמו שזכרנו בפנים.

in response to his conduct and actions. All of a person's deeds, as well as the outcome of those deeds, are scrutinized, and Providence is then extended to him in the particular manner that suits the consequences, and [the individual is judged] measure for measure, as will be discussed in a later chapter. This is not true, however, of any species other than man. The members of other species are acted upon, but have no influence themselves. They merely exist to maintain the species as a whole, according to the nature of its spiritual Root. Providence is thus merely extended to maintain the Root and its branches, according to the inherent nature and function of that Root. Human beings, on the other hand, act and exert influence as individuals. They therefore require individual Providence, and everything must be the result of their deeds, no more and no less.

וזה ממה שאין שייך בשאר המינים שאישיהם נפעלים ולא פועלים, ואינם אלא כפי מה שראוי לתשלום המין ההוא, כפי מה שהושרש בשרשו, שהנה תהיה ההשגחה לקיים השורש ההוא וענפיו, כפי מה שטבע וחוק השורש נותן שיהיה. אבל המין האנושי, שאישיו פועלים ומניעים כמו שזכרנו, הנה צריך שיושגחו בפרט, כפי מה שיגרמו להם מעשיהם, לא פחות ולא יותר.

5. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Emunah Ve-Hashgachah, Volume 1, p. 25 – Individual providence applies to each person concerning each action.**

The concept of specific individual Divine Providence incorporates a couple of concepts. Firstly, the judgment and supervision concern the individual person, who is judged and guided specifically according to his own actions, unlike the animals that are judged in general for the perpetuation of their species.

It also means that God does not judge a person for his general actions but for each action that he makes. God guides a person on this basis in order to give him reward or punishment.

לפי האמור, המושג של "השגחה פרטית" כולל כמה מובנים. ראשית, שהדיון וההשגחה הם על האדם היחיד, כפרט שנידון ומונהג על פי המעשים שלו, ולא נידון כחלק מהכלל לצורך קיום הכלל, כבהמה שהדיון עליה הוא במסגרת הכלל לקיום המין.

ועוד שהקב"ה לא דן רק לפי מעשי האדם בכללותו, אלא הוא דן על כל פרט ופרט ממעשי האדם ומנהיג אותו לפי זה לתת לו שכר או עונש.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ≈ Through providence, God guides the world toward the fulfillment of its purpose. There are two kinds of providence: general and specific.
- ≈ Specific individual Divine Providence applies only to mankind, while the rest of creation is guided by a more general form of providence.
- ≈ The purpose of animals and the entire non-human realm is fulfilled by their general existence. Hence, God does not judge or guide them on an individual basis. The exception to this rule is when the fate of these creations intersects that of a person who does have individual specific Divine Providence.
- ≈ God judges people on an individual basis and upon each of their actions in order to guide them toward the fulfillment of their purpose.

SECTION III. DEGREES OF INDIVIDUAL DIVINE PROVIDENCE

In the previous section we saw that according to the traditional position of Jewish thought, there is a significant difference between the Divine Providence that directs people, and the providence that applies to the rest of the universe. An important reason for this distinction is the fact that with regard to mankind, who exercises free will, God directs the world *in response* to human choices.

But mankind is subject to general Divine Providence as well. A person may be affected by God's governance of the human race as a whole or that person's specific national identity or location. Which will take precedence, the general Divine Providence or the individual, the natural course of events or the miraculous, is all relative to each person's relationship with God.

PART A. THE RIGHTEOUS MERIT INDIVIDUALIZED PROVIDENCE

The closer one is to God, the greater the providence that person experiences, and the more the laws of chance are violated for their benefit. Although God created the laws of nature for a purpose, He often overrides this purpose in order to fulfill the destiny of the righteous. As a person comes closer to God, and his will approaches God's will, he becomes more and more directly connected to God's purpose in creation. At such a point, the fulfillment of his desires becomes essential for God's purpose, and therefore, he is allowed to have a share in God's rule over nature.

1. Pirkei Avot 2:4 – The more we attune ourselves to God's will, the more He will bend the world to ours.

Make His will into your will, so that He will make your will to be as His will. Nullify your will before His will, so that He will nullify the will of others before your will.

עשה רצונו כרצונך כדי שיעשה רצונך כרצונו בטל רצונך מפני רצונו כדי שיבטל רצון אחרים מפני רצונך.

The more a person begins to resemble his Creator and becomes one with Him, the more he begins to partake of His power. As was the case of the patriarchs and the prophets, God often reveals His plans and acts of providence to the righteous.

2. Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim 3:18 – Providence is not the same for all; it is a function of intellectual awareness of God.

We have just explained that providence exists only for man and not any other creatures, because it only applies to intelligent beings... Consequently, the degree of providence will depend on how equipped he is physically and scholastically, assuming that providence is a function of intelligence, as I mentioned. In other words, providence is not the same for all people but rather differs from one person to another in proportion to the differences in their respective degrees of perfection. According to this idea, providence for prophets must be extremely great

ואחר מה שהקדמתי מהיות ההשגחה מיוחדת במין האדם לבדו משאר מיני ב"ח אומר כי כבר נודע שאין חוץ לשכל מין נמצא... אי זה איש מאישי בני אדם שהשיג מן השפע ההוא חלק יותר גדול כפי הכנת החומר שלו וכפי התלמדו, תהיה ההשגחה עליו יותר בהכרח, אם ההשגחה היא נמשכת אחר השכל כמו שזכרתי, ולא תהיה אם כן ההשגחה האלהית בבני אדם כולם בשוה, אבל יהיה יתרון ההשגחה עליהם כיתרון שלמותם האנושי זה על זה, ולפי זה העיון יתחייב בהכרח שתהיה השגחתו בנביאים עצומה מאד ולפי מדרגותם בנבואה, ותהיה השגחתו בחסידים

and must be a function of their level of prophesy. Similarly, the providence for righteous and pious people should be a reflection of their degree of righteousness and piety...

In contrast, fools and rebels, to the degree that they lack this Divine overflow, their status is debased, and when taken to the extreme they become like animals. "They are comparable to the beasts who perish," (Tehillim 49:13)...

Concerning the disparity of providence for pious men and degenerate fools, the verse says, "He will guard the feet of His pious ones while the wicked will be silenced in the darkness, because a man will not prevail with strength" (Shmuel/ Samuel I 2:9). The verse informs us that the reason that some individuals are saved from disaster while others aren't is not because of their physical strength and natural dispositions. Rather, it depends upon their degree of perfection or deficiency, i.e., their nearness to or distance from God... There are innumerable verses which indicate this principle that providence is proportional to perfection and piety.

ובטובים כפי חסידותם וישרונם...

ואמנם הסכלים הממרים, כפי מה שחסרו מן השפע
ההוא היה ענינם נבזה וסודרו בסדר שאר אישי מיני
בעלי חיים 'נמשל כבהמות נדמו' (תהילים מט, יג) ...

ונאמר בהשגחה על החשובים החסידים ועזיבת
הסכלים, רגלי חסידיו ישמור ורשעים בחשך ידמו כי
לא בכח יגבר איש, יאמר כשישלם קצת אישי המין מן
המכות והמקרים ונפול קצתם בהם, אינו לפי כחותם
הגופיים והכנותיהם הטבעיות, הוא אמרו כי לא בכח
יגבר איש, אבל הוא לפי השלמות והחסרון, ר"ל קרבם
אל השם או רחקם ממנו ... והפסוקים אשר באו בזה
הענין רבו מלספור, ר"ל בהשגחה על בני אדם כפי
שיעור שלימותם וחסידותם.

If the highest level of individual Divine Providence only pertains to the truly righteous – those who are constantly mentally connected with God and who have perfected themselves – what does that mean for the rest of us?

PART B. THE NATURE OF NATURE

To answer the questions above, we have to come to a better understanding of the concept of "nature" in Jewish thought.

1. Ramban (Nachmanides), Commentary to Exodus 13:16 – The belief in Divine direction of the world is expressed in terms of Divine response to human deeds.

From knowing the revealed miracles, a person becomes aware of the hidden miracles – this belief is the basis for the entire Torah. A man has no share in the Torah, unless he believes that all matters and all events, whether on a communal level or an individual level, are miracles, and not due to "nature" or "the way of the world." Rather, if a person performs the mitzvot, his reward will bring him success, and if he transgresses, he incurs punishment, all by decree from Above.

ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים
הנסתרים שהם יסוד התורה כלה, שאין לאדם חלק
בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו
שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם, בין ברבים
בין ביחיד, אלא אם יעשה המצות יצליחנו שכרו, ואם
יעבור עליהם יכריתנו ענשו, הכל בגזרת עליון.

2. **Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, Sfat Emet, Parshat Behar 5637 – Nature and miracle are one and the same.**

Miracles and nature are one and the same. In truth, the biggest miracle is nature itself for it is the greatest of all wonders for us to contemplate... Those generations that witnessed miracles had faith affixed to them, and for them miracle and nature were the same.

הנסים והטבעים הכל אחד ובאמת אין נס גדול כמו הטבע שהוא הגדול שבנפלאות המושגים לנו... ובאמת הדורות שנעשה להם הנסים היה קבוע בהם האמונה והיה שווה להם הטבע והנסים.

Clearly, God is just as in control of nature when it runs its course as He is when He performs miracles. Being left to “nature,” therefore, does not mean that a person is outside of God’s providence. It just means that God’s providence is filtered through the medium of nature.

3. **Ramban, Devarim (Deuteronomy) 11:13 – God deals with most people through the medium of nature.**

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.

ודע כי הנסים לא יעשו לטובה או לרעה רק לצדיקים גמורים או לרשעים גמורים, אבל הבינונים כדרך מנהגו של עולם יעשה בהם טובה או רעה כדרכם וכעלילותם:

Though mankind was created for the sake of his ultimate future existence (in the World to Come), we are still part of this world, and are subject to its natural laws. However, the laws of nature themselves were ordained by God to accomplish His purpose. As such, being “left to the way of the world” does not mean that God is unaware or uninvolved in a person’s life. God uses nature as the medium to respond to our actions. Therefore, most people must function within the parameters of the laws of nature and not expect God to make too many miracles for them.

4. **Rabbi Aharon of Barcelona, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 546 – God expects most of us to follow the laws of nature and not to rely on miracles.**

God 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 God 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. God created the body of man and breathed into him a soul, his conscious awareness with which he can guard

השם ברוך הוא משגיח בפרטי בני אדם ויודע כל מעשיהם וכל אשר יקרה להם טוב או רע בגזרתו ובמצותו לפי זכותו או חובו, וכענין שאמרו זכרונם לברכה [חולין ז' ע"ב] אין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמטה אלא אם כן מכריזין עליו מלמעלה.

אף על פי כן צריך האדם לשמור עצמו מן המקרים הנהוגים בעולם, כי האל ברא עולמו ובנאו על יסודות עמודי הטבע, וגזר שתהיה האש שורפת והמים מכבים הלהבה, וכמו כן יחייב הטבע שאם תפול אבן גדולה על ראש איש שתצץ את מוחו או אם יפול האדם מראש הגג הגבוה לארץ שימות, והוא ברוך הוא חנן גופות בני אדם ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים בעלת דעת לשמור הגוף מכל פגע ונתן שניהם הנפש וגופה בתוך גלגל היסודות והמה ינהגום ויפעלו במ פעולות. ואחר שהאל שעבד

himself against harm, and He placed both of them within the domain of natural processes which both guide and activate them. Thus, God 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.

However, there are a few people that the King values highly because of their great piety and because their souls are strongly attached to Him. They are the great *tzadikim* (righteous ones), such as our holy patriarchs and many of their descendants such as Daniel, Chananya, Mishael and Azariyah. God gave them power to control nature. Originally, nature controlled them, but because of their lofty spirituality, they became masters over nature. We know, for example, that Avraham was thrown into a fiery furnace yet was not harmed; nor were the four mentioned above. Not even a hair of their heads was singed. However, most people, because of their many sins, have not merited such an elevated spiritual level. Consequently, the Torah has commanded us to guard our property and places so they don't cause death through our negligence. We cannot put our lives in danger by relying on miracles for protection. In fact, our Sages say that whoever relies on a miracle to save himself will not have a miracle done for him (Torat Cohanim, Parasahat Emor, 8).

This is the approach that applies in most instances. For example, even when the Jews fought a war commanded directly by God, they used the best strategies and armed themselves, and overall acted as if they were relying totally on natural means...

גוף האדם לטבע, כי כן חייבה חכמתו, מצד שהוא בעל חומר, ציוהו לשמור מן המקרה, כי הטבע שהוא מסור בידו יעשה פעולתו עליו אם לא ישמר ממנו.

ואמנם יהיו קצת מבני אדם אשר המלך חפץ ביקרם לרוב חסידותם ודבקות נפשם בדרכיו ברוך הוא, המה החסידים הגדולים אשר מעולם אנשי השם כמו האבות הגדולים והקדושים והרבה מן הבנים שהיו אחריהם כמו דניאל חנניה מישאל ועזריה ודומיהם, שמסר האל הטבע בידיהם, ובתחלתם היה הטבע אדון עליהם, ובסופן לגודל התעלות נפשם נהפוך הוא שהיו הם אדונים על הטבע, כאשר ידענו באברהם אבינו שהפילוהו בכבשן האש ולא הוזק, וארבעת החסידים הנזכרים ששמו אותם לגו אתון נורא יקידתא ושער ראשהון לא איתחרך. ורוב בני אדם בחטאם לא זכו אל המעלה הגדולה הזאת, ועל כן תצוו התורה לשמור משכנותינו ומקומותינו לבל יקרנו מות בפשיעותינו ולא נסכן נפשותינו על סמך הנס, ואמרו זכרונם לברכה [תורת כהנים אמור פרשתא ח'] שכל הסומך על הנס אין עושין לו נס.

ועל הדרך הזה תראה רוב עניני הכתובים בכל מקום, כי גם בהלחם ישראל מלחמת מצוה על פי ה' היו עורכין מלחמתן ומזיינין עצמן ועושין כל ענינם כאילו יסמכו בדרכי הטבע לגמרי...

So most of us must live our lives within the parameters of nature. But what Rambam said above still holds true: to the extent that we are plugged in to God, we can still hope for miracles.

Tiffany Stein did have a theological problem of sorts. Tiffany is 12 years old and wants some sign from God that He really exists. Her mother tells me that her daughter prays every night for some clear indication from above, some unmistakable manifestation. Would I kindly see Tiffany and try to help her?

I meet with Tiffany. Sweet, sensitive, intelligent. "I know God does wonderful things for everybody, like making the sun rise, and letting us see and hear and all that. But if God really is up there," says Tiffany, "why doesn't He prove it to me personally by making some little miracle for me? I pray every night for that, but He isn't listening to me."

I try to define for her what a miracle really is: God breaking the rules of nature He Himself established. God, I suggest to her, performs miracles for us when we perform miracles for Him.

She asks, “But how can a human being perform a miracle?”

“In our own small way, we can. Remember, a miracle is a change in the natural order of things. When we change our personal and natural order of things for the sake of God, when we go against our natural desires and instincts for His sake – that makes it possible for God to do the same thing for us, and to change the natural order of things for our sake.”

I explain to her the concept of “measure for measure,” the idea that God treats us in the way we treat Him, that our relationship with God is a two-way street.

“Well, how come so many miracles occurred to the people in the Bible? Were they so much better than we are?”

“They certainly were. They were not perfect, but they were willing to give up everything they had for the sake of God. They broke from the natural order of things, so God did the same for them. It wasn't natural for Abraham to be ready to sacrifice his son, for example, or for the Children of Israel to follow Moses into the Red Sea or into the Wilderness.”

“So you're saying that unless I become a really outstanding person and a really deep believer in God, I'm not going to see any real signs from Him?”

*“Once you get into the habit of breaking out of your natural ways for the sake of Judaism, then you're on your way. For example, you want to really hurt someone, but you don't. You want to steal something, but you don't. You want to eat on Yom Kippur, but you don't... In the same way that we deal with God in our service of Him, so does He deal with us as His creatures. Whether He will deal with us according to the laws of nature, or beyond the laws of nature, is really up to us.” (Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, *Tales Out of Shul*, Artscroll/Mesorah Publications, pp. 198 -200)*

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III.

- ∞ The level of individual providence is not the same for all. At its highest level, God bends the laws of nature for the sake of the righteous, those most actively involved in advancing God's plan for Creation.
- ∞ Those less plugged into God are dealt with by God in a less direct fashion, through the medium of nature, which hides God's providence.
- ∞ While we understand that God is in control of nature and not bound by its laws, we also recognize that we live within its boundaries and therefore do not expect open miracles to happen for us. Nevertheless, the closer we are to God, the more He will move mountains for us.

SECTION IV. JEWISH SURVIVAL

Since the Jewish people have a special relationship with God and His purpose in creation, the degree of Divine Providence we receive is greater. Our very existence points to unusual Heavenly supervision. Although the Jewish people have always been a minority among the nations, with God's help we have been able to survive and thrive throughout the generations.

PART A. ONE NATION, ONE GOD

1. Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 34:30-31 – The Jewish people have a special relationship with God.

“And they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and they are My people, the House of Israel,” says the Lord God. “And you are My flocks, the flocks of My pasture, you are man; I am your God,” says the Lord God.

וידעו כי אני יקוק אלקיהם אתם והמה עמי בית ישראל
נאם אדני יקוק: ואתן צאני צאן מרעיתי אדם אתם אני
אלהיכם נאם אדני יקוק:

2. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 6a – God has pledged His allegiance to the Jewish people.

Rabbi Nachman bar Isaac said to Rabbi Chiyya bar Avin, “What is written in the *tefillin* (phylacteries) of the Lord of the Universe?” He replied to him: “And who is like Thy people Israel, one nation on the earth” (Divrei HaYamim/Chronicles I 17:21). Does, then, the Holy One, blessed be He, sing the praises of Israel? Yes, for it is written (Devarim 26:17): “You have declared allegiance to the Lord this day,” (which can be read as) “and the Lord has declared allegiance to you this day.” The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, “You have made me a unique entity in the world, and I shall make you a unique entity in the world.” “You have made me a unique entity in the world,” as it is said: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” “And I shall make you a unique entity in the world,” as it is said: “And who is like Your people Israel, one nation on the earth.”

אמר ליה רב נחמן בר יצחק לרב חייא בר אבין: הני תפילין דמרי עלמא מה כתיב בהו? אמר ליה: (דברי הימים א' י"ז): ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ. ומי מושתבח קודשא בריך הוא בשבחייהו דישאל? - אין, דכתיב: (דברים כ"ו) את ה' האמרת היום (וכתיב) וה' האמירך היום. אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם, ואני אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם; אתם עשיתוני חטיבה אחת בעולם, שנאמר: (דברים ו') שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד. ואני אעשה אתכם חטיבה אחת בעולם, שנאמר: ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ.

3. Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet, Teshuvot Ha-Rashba 5:55 – He is our God, and we are His people.

It says (in the Shema prayer), “our God” for He supervises us. In addition to this, He guides us, and not any star or constellation or angelic force – only God. He has designated us for Himself and taken us as His portion, as it says, “When the Most High gave nations their heritage... His own nation remained God's portion” (Devarim 32:8-9).

על כן אמר אלהינו: כי הוא משגיח בנו. ומצטרף לזה שהוא מנהיגנו, ולא כוכב ולא מזל ולא שר משרי מעלה, רק הוא ית'. ושהוא הבדילנו לשמו, ולקחנו לחלקו. כאומרו: בהנחל עליון גוים וכו', כי חלק ה' עמו.

This special relationship with God is what has made Jewish history so unique.

4. Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Living Inspired, p. 152 – The miracles of the Exodus teach us that the natural order of the Jewish people is to be *above* the natural order of the world.

The Sfat Emet expresses the connection between the miracles commemorated at the [Passover] *Seder* and the rest of Jewish history, in the most beautiful manner. He asks why we call the procedure of *Seder* Night a “*sedra*” – the word “*sedra*” means “order,” a regular, predictable series of events. Strange

that we celebrate the most potent series of miracles, the sharpest departures from the natural order, with the name *seder*, “order”!

His answer is unforgettable. *For the Jewish people, our natural order is the miraculous!* We have a *seder* of miracles. We were forged in impossible circumstances, conceived in a blaze of miracles, born beyond time. We can never descend into the natural [. . .]

PART B. WITNESSES TO JEWISH PROVIDENCE

Many non-Jews have noted the historical marvel of the survival of the Jewish People. A famous example, among many, is that of Mark Twain.

1. **Mark Twain, Concerning the Jews (Harper's Magazine, March 1898) – Jeremiah's prophecy came to pass.**

The Egyptian, the Babylonian and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

Of course, the history of the Jewish People has not been without trouble. On the contrary, Jewish history is among the bloodiest of all nations – indeed, as a lone sheep surrounded by seventy wolves. We have discussed the purpose and meaning of suffering in the Morasha class entitled “The Miracle of Jewish Survival.” For the purposes of this class, it suffices to understand that no matter the troubles that befall the Jewish People, God continually watches over us, ensuring our ultimate survival.

3. **Tehillim 121:4 – The Guardian of Israel.**

The Guardian of Israel does not sleep nor slumber.

הנה לא ינום ולא יישן שומר ישראל.

Indeed, even other religions have recognized our unique survival, and its implication.

4. **John Paul II, Address Concerning Relations with Jews, March 6, 1982 – The permanence of Israel.**

The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God's design... It remains a Chosen People, “the pure olive on which were grafted the branches of the wild olive which are the gentiles.”

... We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity (productivity), in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times.

The Jewish People, whose creation came about by means of direct Divine intervention in the world order, enjoy a special degree of Divine Providence. The next source is an illustration of the miraculous overtones in Jewish history, which clearly attest to Divine providence.

As part of their first-year studies, cadets at West Point Military academy are enrolled in a course called “The History of Military Tactics,” taught by a Three Star Lieutenant General with a Ph.D. in military strategy. The course surveys the major battles in history, right down to the latest battles of our modern era.

During the final two weeks of the course, which were devoted to reviewing the material, a Jewish cadet raised his hand with a question, “Why did we not study any of the battles fought by the Jews, either of ancient times [i.e. Roman-Jewish wars] or of modern times [i.e. Arab-Israeli wars]?”

The normally friendly general snapped back with an order to see him in his office after the class. Upon entering the general’s office, the student was ordered to close and lock the door. The general then told him that he would only answer the question in the privacy of his office.

“Do not think that the staff here at West Point has left the Jewish wars unnoticed,” began the general. “We have examined and analyzed them, and we do not teach them at West Point. According to military strategy and textbook tactics, the Jews should have lost them. You should have been swept into the dustbin of history long ago. But you were not. You won those wars against all odds and against all military strategies and logic.

“This past year, we hired a new junior instructor. During a private staff meeting and discussion, the Arab-Israeli wars came under discussion. We were puzzled at how you won those wars. Suddenly, this junior instructor chirped up and jokingly said, ‘Gentlemen, it seems to be quite obvious how they are winning their wars: God is winning their wars!’ Nobody laughed. The reason is, soldier, that it seems to be an unwritten rule around here at West Point that G-d is winning your wars. And God does not fit into military textbooks! You are dismissed,” concluded the general. (Heard from Rabbi Asher Wade, Jerusalem)

Even in historical events that seem completely natural, one can discern God’s providence directing events toward a certain conclusion. This can be apparent simply by virtue of the fact that the events seem to be geared toward an ultimate result. However, sometimes the manifestation of Divine Providence is even more striking. Jewish history, in particular, is replete with examples of highly improbable events in which the Jewish people were saved from danger in miraculous ways – overt signs of Divine intervention. As David Ben Gurion once commented in an interview on CBS (5 October 1956), “In Israel, in order to be a realist you must believe in miracles.”

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ⌘ A special measure of Divine Providence accompanies the Jewish People.
- ⌘ It is thus fitting that the most startling demonstration of Divine Providence is the very history of the Jewish nation – a history that all agree defies the natural order of the world.
- ⌘ Even today, the history of the State of Israel, a tiny country that has miraculously survived against foes that greatly outnumber it, provides the world with clear revelations of Divine Providence.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHAT DOES “DIVINE PROVIDENCE” REALLY MEAN?

Providence means supervision, which itself implies both knowledge of the object being supervised as well as a response based on that knowledge. Hence there are two components to Divine Providence: God's awareness of our actions and His management of our lives based on that awareness.

God must be aware of everything in this world because it only exists as an expression of His will. Were He not aware of something, it would simply cease to exist.

God's governance of this world is a function of the purpose for which He created it. Divine Providence, therefore, is God's medium for driving the world toward its perfection through His direct although subtle involvement with it. This comes in two forms: general providence for the non-human realm and specific individual providence for people.

DOES GOD REALLY CARE ABOUT ANIMALS AND INSECTS? DOES MY DOG HAVE DIVINE PROVIDENCE TOO?

The Torah teaches us that all natural phenomena are controlled by God. Divine Providence extends to the growth and proper functioning of every form of plant and animal life, as well as every other part of the natural world.

But Divine Providence of these things only concerns them on a general basis. God's plan for creation requires flies but what happens to individual flies is not of great concern. The exception is when these things in the non-human realm affect people, as when someone owns a dog or gets bitten by a snake.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT DEGREES OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE AMONG PEOPLE, OR IS EVERYONE THE SAME?

Yes there are. As Rambam taught us, one's level of personal or specific Divine Providence is a function of his self-perfection and closeness to God. The purely righteous are aided by God at every step; He even performs miracles on their behalf, bending the rules of nature in their favor. For those less connected than that, God still watches over them and responds to their actions, just in more subtle ways, usually behind the veil of nature.

DOES BEING THE CHOSEN NATION MEAN THAT WE HAVE A SPECIAL MEASURE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE?

Yes it does. God not only chose us but promised to protect us as we try to fulfill the purpose of Creation. That promise has produced the miracle of Jewish survival throughout the millennia.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Emunah Ve-Hashgachah, Maamar Aleph

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Volume II, Chapter 19

Rabbi Aryeh Leibowitz, Hashgachah Pratit, Part One