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# HASHGACHAH PRATIT II

## ❧ DIVINE PROVIDENCE ❧

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### Perceiving God in Our Lives

In the first Morasha class on Hashgachah Pratit, we learned that Judaism teaches that God is aware of all our actions and responds to our decisions. God supervises and directs the entire cosmos, and even the minutest details of the physical world, in response to the choices that we make. This individualized supervision of our lives is known as Hashgachah Pratit – Divine Providence.

This class will address how we can see Hashgachah Pratit in all aspects of our lives – our life circumstances, personal attributes, health, family, profession, challenges and even our lifespan.

Some questions we will address in this class:

- ❧ How do I see God's Providence? Is He really "talking to me" through events in my life?
- ❧ Does Judaism believe in fate? If so, can it be changed?
- ❧ Aren't changes in economies and my paycheck random?
- ❧ What about accidents and mishaps? Are those also part of God's providence?

#### Class Outline

- Section I. Reading the Signs
- Section II. Providence in Our Lives – General Principles
  - Part A. This is Only a Test
  - Part B. Life Circumstances and Traits
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- Section III. Providence in Our Lives – Specific Manifestations
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  - Part D. Livelihood
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  - Part F. Lifespan

## SECTION I. READING THE SIGNS

If God's providence is really so pervasive, why is it not evident to the observer? The answer is that it is only apparent to those who look for it. The ability to perceive God's providence is determined by our efforts to see it in our lives, as the following story illustrates so dramatically:

*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, God and I are very close. God 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, 'God! 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, God does miracles for me."*

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

*God 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 God to push you off a cliff and catch you. (Rabbi Noach Weinberg, "How to Get Your Prayers Answered," from [www.aish.com](http://www.aish.com))*

The great Hassidic Master, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (known as the Kotzker Rebbe) used to ask: Where is God? His answer: Wherever we let Him in. The ability to see God in our lives is not a function of His involvement. It's a function of our awareness.

### 1. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Moadim, Vol. 2, p. 323 – When a person wants to see God's hand in his life, it is revealed to him; otherwise, he simply sees the laws of nature.**

When we are disconnected from God and are unaware of Him, then God 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.

כאשר אנו במצב של אי דביקות וחוסר מודעות אין הקב"ה מראה השגחתו ח"ו, אזי נראה כאילו יד הטבע שולטת ח"ו.

ככל שנתחזק יותר באמונת ההשגחה, באותה מידה נזכה והקב"ה יראה לנו את השגחתו המיוחדת.

Perceiving God's providence in our lives is more than just a convenience. It is a Jewish value.

### 2. **Rabbi Natan Meir Wachtfogel, Leket Reshimot, Inyanei Purim, pp. 98-100 – We have an obligation to make the effort to see God's providence.**

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz explained that the Midrash which says that the verse "You should

אמר בשם רבי ירוחם, דאיתא בספרי (דברים פ"א פה) "אחרי ה' תלכו, זה עמוד הענן [זה מצוה

follow after God,” (Devarim/Deuteronomy 13:5) refers to the Clouds of Glory that led the Jewish people in the desert (Shemot/Exodus 13:22)... is telling us that there is a positive obligation for every person to follow after God’s providence...

If we don’t try to see providence, then we won’t see or experience any, and we won’t even know what providence is. If, however, one does try to see providence, he will immediately see it in every single step. This is the principle that unless one searches one will never see...

[As an example,] Moshe [Moses] merited everything because he halted in order to see the burning bush (Shemot/Exodus 3:1-22). There were many other shepherds that had passed by and seen the bush burning, but they didn’t stop... Moshe stopped to see because he knew that everything that a person is shown has a purpose. Every single movement within the creation demands a reaction. Once he had stopped to look, he immediately saw that the bush was burning with fire and wasn’t being consumed. He wondered, “What is this great vision?” (Shemot 3:3), and he drew close. And then, “God saw that he turned to look,” and as a result “God called to him” (ibid. 3:4).

לדורות]”...וביאר שיש כאן מצות עשה ללכת אחרי  
ההשגחה...

מי שלא מחפש לראות השגחה, לא יראה השגחה,  
ולא יחיה השגחה, ולא ידע מה זה השגחה! ואם יחפש  
לראות השגחה, מיד יראה השגחה! על כל צעד ושעל!  
דזה הכלל: אם לא מחפשים לא רואים...

משה רבינו זכה להכל ע”י שנעצר לראות את הסנה...  
היו שם עוד הרבה רועי צאן שעברו וראו סנה בוער  
ולא נעצרו... משה רבינו נעצר, כי ידע דכל מה שמראים  
לאדם יש בו איזה מכון, כל תנועה כל תזוזה בבריאה  
צריך להגיב על זה. “ואחרי שנעצר לראות” אז פתאום  
ראה שהסנה בוער באש ואינו אוכל, ותמה מהו המראה  
הזה, וניגש “ויקרא ה’ כי סר לראות” “ויקרא לו ה’”...

Awareness of Divine providence can open our eyes to another very important reality. Because God controls and decrees everything that takes place in the world, even the most seemingly insignificant details, it is logical to conclude that every event has a purpose. The purpose of many events is to send a message to human beings, and indeed, we frequently encounter Divinely orchestrated incidents that are meant to communicate a point to us or teach us a lesson.

The Talmud notes that even if a person places his hand in his pocket to take out three coins but gets only two and must put his hand in again, this could be considered a message (in the form of *yissurim*, suffering) to motivate him to improve.

### 3. Talmud Bavli, Arachin 16b – The most minimal of disturbances are categorized as “suffering,” signs from God to wake up.

What minor disturbances can still be considered a form of suffering? Rabbi Elazar said: When they weave a garment for you and it doesn’t fit. Rava Ze’ira countered (and others say it was Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani): A better [indication] than this has been said: if you ordered a hot drink and they bring you a cold one, or a cold one and they bring you a hot one. So why did you set the bar so high? Mar, the son of Ravina,

עד היכן תכלית יסורין? אמר רבי אלעזר: כל שארגו לו  
בגד ללבוש ואין מתקבל עליו. מתקיף לה רבא זעירא,  
ואיתימא רבי שמואל בר נחמני, גדולה מזו אמרו:  
אפילו נתכוונו למזוג בחמין ומזוגו לו בצונן, בצונן ומזוגו  
לו בחמין, ואת אמרת כולי האי! מר בריה דרבינא  
אמר: אפילו נהפך לו חלקו. רבא, ואיתימא רב חסדא,  
ואיתימא רבי יצחק, ואמרי לה במתניתא תנא: אפילו  
הושיט ידו לכיס ליטול שלש ועלו בידו שתיים.

said: Even if you put your shirt on inside out. Rava (and others say it was Rav Chisda or Rabbi Yitzchak) said that the following was taught: Even if you put your hand into your pocket to take out three coins and only two come out!

Even though the most minor occurrences can be messages from God, most people only pay attention to messages that are more dramatic like the motorcyclist falling off the cliff.

And sometimes the messages come to us from events that happen to people other than ourselves. In such a case we are still meant to draw a personal message, as the following story humorously illustrates:

*A cab driver who was driving Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, mashgiach (spiritual counselor) of Mir [Yeshiva] in Europe and later in Ponevezh [Yeshiva] in Israel, related that he once witnessed an open miracle. When secular Israelis finish their army service, they typically unwind by touring some exotic location. After his discharge, this cab driver had gone with a few of his buddies to tour a mountainous region in Africa. One night, they awoke in their tent to hear one of their friends screaming in terror. The boy was enveloped by a huge boa constrictor, which was squeezing him to death.*

*They had no idea how to free their friend, and they were afraid to do anything to the snake, for fear that they would antagonize it and make it squeeze even harder. Facing what seemed to be inevitable, a member of the group told his friend, "I know that when Jews are about to die, they recite Shema. You should recite it now."*

*As soon as the ex-soldier screamed, "Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad," the snake unwound itself and slithered away into the darkness of night.*

*"The miracle changed my friend's life," the cab driver concluded. "He went directly back to Israel, and is now an observant Jew."*

*"And what about you?" Rav Yechezkel asked.*

*"Me?" the driver responded in a quizzical tone. "The Rabbi doesn't understand – the snake wasn't wrapped around me, it was wrapped around my friend." (Rabbi Yitzchak Berkowitz, The Six Constant Mitzvot)*

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ∞ Every second we can choose how to interpret events; are they the cold laws of nature or the warm hand of God?
- ∞ Choosing to see God's hand and providence as the cause of events opens up more and more opportunities to clearly see God's guidance. And the opposite is also true: a denial of God's providence brings a person to see only nature and its laws.
- ∞ Everything that happens is a potential message from God, especially if it is out of the ordinary.
- ∞ Since our perception and awareness is limited, we may not understand all the details of the message. Nevertheless, these events are definitely for our good since every detail of creation contributes to God's purpose, which is to give man the ultimate good – namely, a relationship with God.

## SECTION II. PROVIDENCE IN OUR LIVES – GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The main task of Divine Providence in this world is to set each person in his station in life in order that he may serve God according to his destiny. Everything God does in this world is directed toward this purpose. Some things directly affect the person involved, while other circumstances set up chains of events to help him reach his purpose.

What is the purpose of God's intimate involvement in every aspect of a person's life? The mission of every human being in this world boils down to a very simple mandate: choose right over wrong, good over evil. Thus, the purpose of creation calls for man to be constantly confronted by such choices – and each person receives personally designed options to choose from.

### PART A. THIS IS ONLY A TEST

Every person's station in life is a test, wherein he can choose either to serve God to the best of his ability or not. Whether a person is rich or poor, healthy or sickly, intelligent or dull, he can always make use of his qualities for good or for bad.

#### 1. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal), Derech HaShem (The Way of God) 2:3:1 – God sets up all people with their own unique challenges by which they may fulfill the purpose of their creation.**

We have already discussed the fact that mankind's task is to live in a world containing both good and evil and to choose the good... The Highest Wisdom determined every possible quality that can be included in the necessarily limited human nature, enabling people to fulfill their ultimate purpose. God then brought into existence all these qualities, together with their causes, effects, and everything that surrounds and accompanies them, decreeing that they should be able to exist in mankind.

In order for these qualities to exist, individuals must be divided into different stations in life. Each of these stations is then a test for the particular individual, allowing all these bad qualities to exist, while giving the individual the opportunity to strive against them and embrace the good...

Thus, every individual has his own challenge in the battle with his lower urges. This is his assignment and responsibility in this world, and within its framework he must strive for success. His deeds are then precisely judged by God's Attribute of Justice, depending on the particular responsibility that was given to him.

הנה כבר הקדמנו, שענין העבודה שנמסרה לאדם, תלוי במה שנבראו בעולם עניני טוב ועניני רע, והושם האדם ביניהם לבחור לו את הטוב... והנה שיערה החכמה העליונה כל פרטי הענינים מזה המין שראוים לימצא וליפול אפשרותם בחק האנושיות, לפי התכלית העיקרי שזכרנו במקומו, והמציא אותם בכל בחינותיהם, סבותיהם ומסובביהם וכל המתלוח להם, וחקק אפשרותם באדם כמ"ש.

ואמנם לשימצאו כל אלה הענינים, הוצרכו מצבים שונים בבני האדם, שכולם יהיו נסיון להם במה שיתנו מקום לכל פרטי בחינות הרע האלה, ומקום לאדם להתחזק כנגדם ולתפוס בטובות...

ונמצא לכל איש ואיש מבני האדם חלק מיוחד בניסיון ובמלחמת היצר, והוא פקודתו ומשאו בעוה"ז וצריך לעמוד בו כפי מה שהוא. ויודנו מעשיו במדת דינו ית', כפי המשא אשר ניתן לו באמת בכל בחינותיו בתכלית הדקדוק.

There are many factors – both general conditions and momentary occurrences – that combine to make up the life circumstances of an individual. Every single one of those factors is decided and dictated by God. Thus, every individual exists at the center of an infinitely complex web of Divinely ordained circumstances that are tailor-made just for him.

## 2. **Shemot Rabbah 31:3 – Every station in life has its test.**

“There is a grievous evil that I saw under the sun; riches kept by their owner for his harm. And those riches are lost through an evil design” (Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 5:12-13). Praiseworthy is the one who stands up to his test, for there is no such creature that God does not test: the wealthy are tested to see whether or not they will be stingy, and the poor are tested to see whether they will accept their lot graciously and not get angry.

הה"ד (קהלת ה) יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש  
עושר שמור לבעליו לרעתו ואבד העושר ההוא בענין  
רע, אשרי אדם שהוא עומד בנסיונו שאין בריה שאין  
הקב"ה מנסה אותה, העשיר מנסה אם תהא ידו  
פתוחה לעניים, ומנסה העני אם יכול לקבל יסורין ואינו  
כועס.

Divine providence constantly sets up situations in which each person must contend with his own struggle between good and evil. Furthermore, each person's choices are often created by the very difference between his own Divinely engineered life circumstances and those of other people.

## 3. **Talmud Bavli, Niddah 31a – We do not always perceive how chains of events in our lives are engineered for our benefit.**

What is the meaning of the Scriptural text, “I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord; for though You were angry with me, Your wrath turned away and You comforted me.” (Yeshaya/Isaiah 12:1). The text alludes to two men who set out on a trading expedition when a thorn got into [the foot of] one of them who then began to shout out blasphemy. After a time, however, when he heard that his friend's ship had sunk into the sea he began to laud and praise [God]. Hence it is written, “Your wrath turned away and You comforted me.”

This is indeed in line with what Rabbi Eleazar stated: What is implied by the Scriptural text, “Who performs wonders alone (i.e., that only He knows about); And blessed is His glorious name forever” (Tehillim/Psalms 72:18-19)? Even the person for whom a miracle is performed is unaware of the miracle.

מאי דכתיב (ישעיהו י"ב) אודך ה' כי אנפת בי ישוב  
אפך ותנחמני, במה הכתוב מדבר - בשני בני אדם  
שיצאו לסחורה, ישב לו קוץ לאחד מהן - התחיל  
מחרף ומגדף, לימים שמע שטבעה ספינתו של חברו  
בים, התחיל מודה ומשבח, לכך נאמר ישוב אפך  
ותנחמני.

והיינו דאמר רבי אלעזר: מאי דכתיב (תהלים ע"ב)  
עושה נפלאות (גדולות) לבדו וברוך שם כבודו לעולם  
- אפילו בעל הנס אינו מכיר בנסו.

In the remainder of the Class we will highlight certain key areas where we can see the hand of Providence in our lives.

## PART B. LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES AND TRAITS

### 1. Talmud Bavli, Niddah 16b – When a child is conceived, his hereditary traits, environment and parents are determined by Divine providence.

Rav Chanina bar Pappa taught: The angel appointed on pregnancy...takes the drop and brings it before God and says: “Master of the World, what will become of this drop? Will he be strong or weak, intelligent or dull, rich or poor?”

But whether he will be righteous or evil is not discussed [and not determined], as Rabbi Chanina taught: “All is in the hands of Heaven except for the awe [awareness] of Heaven.”

דריש ר' חנינא בר פפא אותו מלאך הממונה על ההריון... ונוטל טפה ומעמידה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ואומר לפניו רבוננו של עולם טפה זו מה תהא עליה גבור או חלש חכם או טיפש עשיר או עני.

ואילו רשע או צדיק לא קאמר כדר' חנינא דא"ר חנינא הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים.

### 2. Rashi, Berachot 33b – God sets the stage for our lives but we have the choice as to how to act.

Everything that comes upon a person is in the hands of the Holy One, for example: if he will be tall or short, poor or wealthy, wise or foolish, white skinned or black, everything is in the hands of Heaven. But becoming a righteous person or becoming an evil person doesn't come from Heaven. This He gave into the hand of man. He placed in front of him two paths, and man should choose for himself the awe of God.

כל הבא על האדם ביד הקדוש ברוך הוא הוא; כגון ארוך, קצר, עני, עשיר, חכם, שוטה, לבן, שחור, הכל בידי שמים הוא, אבל צדיק ורשע אינו בא על ידי שמים, את זו מסר בידו של אדם, ונתן לפניו שני דרכים, והוא יבחר לו יראת שמים.

The essential meaning of this Talmudic teaching is that at the time of a person's conception, all of his life circumstances are predetermined, including his own characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, intelligence, affluence and any external factors that will impact his life. What God does not predetermine is whether the individual will be righteous or wicked – i.e., how he will decide about choices that he will face over the course of his life.

## PART C. SET IN STONE?

Does all this mean that our situation in life is set in stone? Is there nothing that can be done to change aspects of our lives that we deem unfortunate?

Even though the rest of a person's characteristics and life circumstances are predetermined, this does not mean that they are etched in stone and unchangeable. With sufficient merit, one can reverse or alter the Heavenly decree. However, a good deal of spiritual merit is necessary in order to accomplish this. Furthermore, the change of the decree is not itself a manifestation of free will; it is a Divine response to the choices that one has made.

### 1. Rashi to Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 156a – Prayer and spiritual merit can change one's fortune.

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

אין מזל לישראל - דעל ידי תפלה וזכות משתנה מזלו לטובה.

Therefore, although a sick person must seek out the best possible medical treatment, one should still pray to God for Divine aid, as the next story illustrates.

*In January 2007 I was invited by Rabbi Dovid Horowitz, of the Shivtei Yisrael shul (synagogue) in Raanana, Israel, to lecture to his community. After the talk, he pointed to the second floor porch which was at least 20 feet above the sidewalk. “You see that balcony? Almost two years ago, in April 2005, a three-year-old girl named Shalhevet fell over the retaining wall and landed head first, suffering severe head trauma.”*

*He explained that Shalhevet was rushed to hospital where doctors tried to alleviate the pressure on her brain, but she slipped into a coma that continued to deepen with each passing day. The doctors feared permanent brain damage.*

*For hours on end, her father Moti would sit and learn Chumash (Torah) at her bedside. He told people that the zechut haTorah (the merit of Torah study) would help his daughter, and he encouraged visitors to study with him.*

*“I know this is hard to believe,” Rabbi Horowitz told me, “but I saw this with my own eyes not once and not twice but numerous times. There was a gauge that measured the pressure on her brain. When we studied Torah together, the gauge would show a slight improvement; when we stopped learning, the pressure reverted back to the critical level.”*

*On a Thursday afternoon three weeks after the accident, neuro-surgeons declared that Shalhevet was “brain dead,” and kept alive only through a machine that was breathing oxygen into her lungs. That Friday night, at the opening of the community Shabbaton (Shabbat convention) – that had been planned months before – all the Torah study and prayer were dedicated as a merit for Shalhevet. The next morning, the community was listening to the reading of the Torah in which Aharon is instructed to kindle the lamps in the Mishkan (tabernacle) (Parshat Beha’alotocha). Rashi explains that because a flame rises, the Torah uses the expression of rising (aliyah) to indicate that one must kindle “until the flame (shalhevet) rises by itself” (Bamidbar 8:2).*

*At almost the exact same time, at about 9:30 am, nurses in Shalhevet’s room noticed that she was breathing on her own for the first time in weeks. And thus began her road to recovery. “She eventually left the hospital and today she is an adorable, healthy, happy girl with no trace of the accident!” Shalhevet has become a “light” of inspiration to all who hear her story. (Rabbi Pesach Krohn, In the Spirit of the Maggid, pg. 226).*

## KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ⌘ God makes a world filled with contrasting life situations – such as wealth and poverty, strength and weakness.
- ⌘ God’s providence then places each person in the perfect situation in which he can make the choice to follow good or evil.
- ⌘ While most aspects of one’s fortune are out of people’s control, through sincere prayer and spiritual merit brought about by good deeds, their fortune can change.



## SECTION III. PROVIDENCE IN OUR LIVES – SPECIFIC MANIFESTATIONS

In the following parts we will show how all the details of a person's life experience are under God's providence. In this way, God sets up the perfect setting and life situation for every individual.

### PART A. HEALTH

Following birth, all aspects of a person's bodily functioning and growth are under God's constant awareness and maintenance, even the smallest details.

#### 1. Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 16a – Every hair is counted and has a separate follicle created for it.

I created many hairs in a man, and for each and every hair, I created a separate follicle, so that two hairs would not grow out of one follicle...for I do not mix up one follicle with the other...

הרבה נימין בראתי באדם וכל נימא ונימא בראתי לה גומא בפני עצמה שלא יהו שתיים יונקות מגומא אחת וכו' בין גומא לגומא לא נתחלף לי...

God's constant management of the human body is what enables it to continue functioning normally. Thus, every time the body rids itself of waste, we are required to recite a blessing to thank God for His ceaseless maintenance of our health.

#### 2. Complete Artscroll Siddur, *Asher Yatzar* – Blessing upon exiting the lavatory, p. 15 – The intricate workings of the intestines, kidneys and other organs are revealed before God.

Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, Who formed man with wisdom, and created within him openings and cavities. It is obvious and known before Your Throne of Glory that if just one of them were to be ruptured or blocked, it would be impossible to stand before You.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר יצר את האדם בחכמה וברא בו נקבים נקבים חלולים חלולים גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך שאם יפתח אחד מהם או יסתם אחד מהם אי אפשר להתקיים ולעמוד לפניך...

#### 3. Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Salant, *Be'er Yosef*, Parshat Vayishlach – Even mundane occurrences and bodily functions are in God's immediate awareness.

This (above mentioned concept) is written in the name of the Vilna Gaon (in the book *Imrei Noam*) regarding the part of the blessing of *Asher Yatzar*, "It is well known before Your Throne of Glory": The purpose of mentioning here the glorious throne in the blessing we recite after using the restroom, is to counter those that say that it is impossible that God is interested, supervises and directs the world to such a trivial extent. Therefore, we say "Before Your Throne of Glory"...to say that even from there God is supervising such mundane things.

וכעין זה כתבו בשם הגר"א (בס' אמרי נעים) על מה שאומרים בברכת אשר יצר, גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך וז"ל: מזה שמזכירים כאן כסא הכבוד בברכת עשיית צרכיו, הוא לאפוקי מדעת האומרים כי אי אפשר שהקב"ה ישגיח על עולם שפל כזה. לכך אנו אומרים שאפילו לפני כסא הכבוד... אפילו משם הוא משגיח על דברים שפלים כאלה.

The continued functioning of the human body is nothing short of miraculous. However, if the body does not function optimally, that is also a result of God's direct supervision. When a person becomes sick or is otherwise in a dangerous situation, his actions are judged to see whether he is worthy of deliverance.

#### 4. **Devarim 22:8 and Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 32a – A person is judged in situations of danger, such as climbing on a roof.**

When you build a new house, you must place a guard-rail around your roof. Do not allow a dangerous situation to remain in your house, since someone can fall from [an unenclosed roof].

Rabbi Yitzchak the son of Rabbi Yehudah said: Let one always pray for mercy not to fall sick; for he that falls sick is told, "Show your merits and you will be acquitted." Said Mar Ukba: Which verse [teaches this]? "...lest any man fall from it (*mimmenu*)," i.e. it is from him [*mimmenu*] that proof must be brought (for acquittal).

כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מועקה לגגך ולא תשים דמים  
בביתך כי יפל הנפל ממנו:

אמר רב יצחק בריה דרב יהודה: לעולם יבקש אדם  
רחמים שלא יחלה, שאם יחלה אומרים לו: הבא זכות  
והפטר. אמר מר עוקבא: מאי קראה (דברים כב) - כי  
יפל הנפל ממנו - ממנו להביא ראיה.

There are many other reasons why sickness or hardship can befall a person. See further the Morasha shiur, *Toward Understanding Suffering & Adversity*.

## PART B. PARENTS

A person's life is strongly influenced by his parents – their behavior and their personalities. This is true because of the effects of heredity and environment, as well as the moral values which people internalize from their parents. A person's parents are not randomly determined; they are given to him by God as part of the intricate Divine plan for his life.

### 1. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem (The Way of God), 2:3:7 – Every person's parents are part of God's providence, and so are the children born to a person.**

One must realize that God's providence takes into account everything associated with every detail, whether it precedes it in time or follows from it...

Therefore when an individual's circumstances and level is judged [and he is given his mission in life], Providence takes into account his parents and ancestors who preceded him, and his children who follow him, and the people of his generation, city and community who are associated with him...

For example, if it is decreed that an individual be granted prominence or wealth, then his children will also be born wealthy, and they too will have wealth and prominence, unless their situation is changed. Wealth such as this is merely the result

עוד צריך לדעת, שהנהגה ההשגחה העליונה, בכל פרט  
מהפרטים, משגחת על כל הנקשר בו מן הקודמים ומן  
המאוחרים...

וממה שיושקף בדינו של איש מהאישים, הוא מדריגתו  
ומצבו במה שקדמו לו, דהיינו האבות, ובמה שיתאחרו  
לו, דהיינו הבנים, ומה שעמו, דהיינו בני הדור או בני  
העיר או בני החברה...

וזה, כי הנה אם יזכה אדם שתפסק לו גדולה ועושר,  
הנה בניו יולדו עשירים, ואם לא יתחדש עליהם ענין,  
יהיו עשירים ובעלי גדולה, וכן להיפך. נמצא שלא הגיע  
העושר ההוא לאותם הבנים, אלא מצד היותם בני  
אותם האבות...

of one's parents. The same can be said of poverty...

On the other hand, it is possible [that one attains good because of his children. Thus, for example,] success and good may be granted to an individual in order that his children be born with these advantages.

ומצד אחר, אפשר שתפסק הצלה או טובה לו על זרע  
שעתיד לצאת ממנו.

## PART C. MARRIAGE

A person's spouse, as well, is preselected by God, and the events that will lead to his eventual marriage are all Divinely orchestrated.

Each marriage is led to by an extremely complex chain of events as to be almost a world in itself. Therefore, the degree of providence to bring about a marriage is as great as that required for a miracle.

### 1. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 2a (according to the Maharsha) – As soon as a child is conceived, God proceeds to set up a chain of events that will lead to his eventual marriage.

Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: "Forty days before the fetus is formed [i.e. at the time of conception], a heavenly voice announces, 'The daughter of this man shall be for that man.'"

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב ארבעים יום קודם יצירת הולד  
בת קול יוצאת ואומרת בת פלוני לפלוני.

We are taught that one of the main tasks of providence is the making of matches, which sometimes even involves bringing people together from opposite ends of the earth. Like all aspects of a person's destiny, one's predestined partner can be altered by merit and prayer.

### 2. Bereishit Rabba 64:4 – God's main occupation is arranging marriages.

A [Roman] matron asked Rabbi Jose bar Halafta, "In how many days did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world?" "In six days," he answered, "as it is written, 'for six days, God made the heaven and earth' (Shemot 20)." She asked, "Then what has He been doing since then?" "He sits and makes matches," he answered, "assigning this man to that woman, and this woman to that man." "If that is His craft," she gibed, "I too can do the same. I have many menservants and many maidservants. I can match them up in no time." He told her, "This may seem easy to you, but to God, it is like the splitting of the Red Sea," and with that, Rabbi Jose bar Halafta left.

She went and matched up one thousand couples in one night, giving this man to that woman, this woman to that man and so on. The next day, the

מטרונה שאלה את ר' יוסי בר חלפתא אמרה לו לכמה  
ימים ברא הקב"ה את עולמו אמר לה לששת ימים  
כדכתיב (שמות כ) כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים  
ואת הארץ, אמרה לו מה הוא עושה מאותה שעה ועד  
עכשיו, אמר לה הקב"ה יושב ומזווג זיווגים בתו של  
פלוני לפלוני, אשתו של פלוני לפלוני, ממונו של פלוני  
לפלוני, אמרה לו ודא הוא אומנתיה? אף אני יכולה  
לעשות כן כמה עבדים כמה שפחות יש לי לשעה קלה  
אני יכולה לזווג, אמר לה אם קלה היא בעיניך, קשה  
היא לפני הקב"ה כקריעת ים סוף, הלך לו ר' יוסי בר  
חלפתא.

מה עשתה נטלה אלף עבדים ואלף שפחות והעמידה  
אותן שורות שורות אמרה פלן יסב לפלונית ופלונית  
תיסב לפלוני, וזיווגה אותן כלילה אחת. למחר אתון

couples returned to her with wounds – this one in the eyes, and that one in the leg. The women said to her, “I do not want this man,” while the men protested, “I do not want that woman.” Straightaway, she summoned R. Jose bar Halafta and admitted to him: “There is no god like your God: it is true, your Torah is indeed beautiful and praiseworthy, and you spoke the truth!” He said to her, “As I said, it may seem easy to you, but to the Holy One, blessed be He, it is as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea.’

לגבה דין מוחיה פציעא, דין עינו שמיטא, דין רגליה תבירא, אמרה להון מה לכון? דא אמרה לית אנא בעי לדין, ודין אמר לית אנא בעי לדא, מיד שלחה והביאה את ר' יוסי בר חלפתא אמרה לו לית אלוה כאלהכון אמת היא תורתכון נאה ומשובחת. יפה אמרת! אמר לא כך אמרתי לך? אם קלה היא בעיניך קשה היא לפני הקב"ה כקריעת ים סוף.

The following story demonstrates how seemingly unrelated chains of events come together to produce couples.

*Joanne Ness was a nutritionist in Los Angeles whose clients were mostly professional athletes. In her personal life, Joanne had become more involved in Judaism. She had been invited to speak at a nutritionists' conference in Philadelphia, and as she packed her bags in Los Angeles, she took along a book she had received from a friend, "From Generation to Generation," by the renowned psychiatrist Rabbi Abraham Twerski, MD. She was due to arrive back in Los Angeles at 2 p.m. in time for the first night of the festival of Shavuot (the Festival of Weeks), which would start at 8 p.m. that evening. But there was terrible fog in Philadelphia, and the airport was closed! Finally, she managed to get on a flight to Pittsburgh, but the onward flight to Los Angeles was delayed for mechanical reasons.*

*She became concerned as she realized she would have to stay in Pittsburgh for Shavuot – and she did not know a soul. Then she remembered! The author of the book she was reading lived in Pittsburgh. From the book, he seemed like a kind and generous man with a family that cared for fellow Jews. She found Rabbi Twerski's address in the phonebook, got into a taxi and set off.*

*Rabbi Twerski and his son gladly made phone calls and found her a family to stay with. Joanne was invited to eat the lunch with the Twerskis, which she gladly accepted and thanked him for his wonderful book. In true Twerski tradition, there were numerous guests at the table, one of which was a close friend of Rabbi Twerski, Mr. Brad Perelman. Brad had been looking for a shidduch (spouse) for many years and as he sat at the table it occurred to him that maybe his shidduch had come to him. He asked her out, she consented, and they dated – six weeks later they were engaged!*

*But there is more. Years earlier, Brad Perelman had told Rabbi Twerski in a heart-to-heart talk, "Rabbi, your family tradition is so rich and so inspirational; you must write and publish the stories of your parents and their remarkable way of life." From that conversation, Rabbi Twerski eventually wrote from "From Generation to Generation." In the introduction he thanks Brad (not mentioned by name) for encouraging him to write it. Today Brad and Joanne Perelman thank Rabbi Twerski for publishing it. (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Echoes of the Maggid, pg. 110)*

The Torah's classic example of how providence ordains marriages is that of Yitzchak (Isaac) and Rivka (Rebecca). So pronounced was the hand of God in their union that it was even acknowledged by one of the greatest foes of the nascent Jewish nation, Lavan (Rivka's brother). From their story we can learn why it is so important to God to spend His time making marriages.

### 3. Bereishit 24:10, 42- 51 – The *shidduch* (match) of Rivkah and Yitzchak is Divinely guided by extraordinary events.

The servant (Eliezer) took ten camels from his

י וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֲשָׂרָה גְמֵלִים מִגְּמְלֵי אֲדָנָיו, וַיֵּלֶךְ, וְכָל-טוֹב

master's (Abraham's) camels and departed. All the best of his master was in his hand. He rose and went to Aram Naharayim; to the city of Nachor... (After meeting with Rivkah, Eliezer goes to her father, Betuel and brother, Lavan to recount the events at the well and to offer Yitzchak in marriage)... "I came this day to the well, and I said, 'Lord, God of my master, Avraham, please grant success to my journey on which I am going. Behold, here I stand at the well of water. When a girl comes out to draw water, I will say to her, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher." If she says to me, "You too may drink, and I will also draw water for your camels," then she is the one who God has determined for the son of my master.' Before I had finished speaking these words to myself, suddenly Rivkah came out with her pitcher on her shoulder. She went down to the well and drew water; and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' She quickly lowered her pitcher and said, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink.' I drank and she also gave the camels to drink.

"I asked her and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' She replied, 'The daughter of Betuel, son of Nachor, whom Milkah bore unto him.' I [then] placed a nose ring on her nose and bracelets upon her hands. I bowed and prostrated myself to God, and I blessed the Lord, G-d of my master Avraham, Who led me on the true path [in order] to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son. Now if you want to do what is kind and true to my master, tell me. If not, tell me, and I will turn to the right or to the left." Lavan and Betuel answered and said, "This is from God; we cannot say anything to you, bad or good. Here, Rivkah is before you, take her and go. Let her be a wife to your master's son, as God has spoken."

אֲדֹנָיו, בְּיָדוֹ; וַיָּקָם, וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-אַרְם נְהָרַיִם--אֶל-עִיר נַחֹר... מִבְּיַד אֲבִיךָ הַיּוֹם, אֶל-הָעֵינָן; וַיֹּאמֶר, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרְהָם, אִם-יִשְׁכַּח-נָא מִצְּלִיחַ דְּרַבִּי, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי הֹלֵךְ עִלְיָהּ. מִזֶּה הִנֵּה אֲנִי נֹצֵב, עַל-עֵינֵי הַמַּיִם; וְהִיא הַעֲלָמָה, הַיִּצְאָת לְשָׂאב, וְאִמְרָתִי אֵלֶיהָ, הַשְּׁקִינִי-נָא מִזֶּמַּט-מַיִם מִבְּדֶךְ. מִדּוּ וְאִמְרָה אֵלַי גַּם-אֶתָּה שְׂתֵה, וְגַם לְגַמְלֶיךָ אֲשָׂאב--הוּא הָאִשָּׁה, אֲשֶׁר-הִכִּיחַ יְהוָה לְבֹן-אֲדֹנָי. מַה אֲנִי טָרַם אֲכַלֶּה לְדַבֵּר אֶל-לְבִי, וְהִנֵּה רַבְּקָה יִצְאָת וְכִדָּה עַל-שִׁכְמָהּ, וְתִרְדַּד הָעֵינָה, וְתִשָּׂאב; וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ, הַשְּׁקִינִי נָא. מִזֶּה וְתִמְהַר, וְתִתְרַד בְּדָה מֵעֲלֵיךָ, וְתִאֲמַר שְׂתֵה, וְגַם-גַּמְלֶיךָ אֲשָׁקָה; וְאִשָּׁתִּי, וְגַם הַגַּמְלִים הַשְּׁקִתָּהּ.

מִזֶּה וְאִשָּׁאֵל אֶתָּה, וַיֹּאמֶר בֶּת-מִי אַתָּה, וְתִאֲמַר בֶּת-בְּתוּאֵל בֶּן-נַחֹר, אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה-לוֹ מִלְכָּה; וְאִשְׁם הַנְּזָם עַל-אִפְּהָ, וְהַצְּמִידִים עַל-יָדֶיהָ. מִחַ וְאִקְדוּ וְאִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה, לַיהוָה; וְאֲבִרְהָ, אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרְהָם, אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲמִת, לְקַחַת אֶת-בֶּת-אָחִי אֲדֹנָי לְבָנוּ. מִטּוֹ וְעַתָּה אִם-יִשְׁכַּח עֲשִׂים חֶסֶד וְאֲמִת, אֶת-אֲדֹנָי--הַגִּידוּ לִי; וְאִם-לֹא--הַגִּידוּ לִי, וְאִפְּנֶה עַל-יָמִין אוֹ עַל-שְׂמֹאל. גַּ וַיַּעַן לְבֹן וּבְתוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ, מִיְהוָה יֵצֵא הַדְּבָר; לֹא נוֹכַל דַּבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ, רַע אוֹ-טוֹב. נָא הִנֵּה-רַבְּקָה לְפָנֶיךָ, קַח וְלֵךְ; וְתִהִי אִשָּׁה לְבֶן-אֲדֹנֶיךָ, בְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה.

We see that the shidduch of Yitzchak and Rivkah is clearly Divinely orchestrated and is in fact a paradigm for the Hashgachah Pratit for all marriages.

#### 4. **Rabeinu Bachya, Bereishit 24:50 – The events of Yitzchak and Rivkah's shidduch are a model for all marriages.**

When Betuel and Lavan acknowledged that the shidduch was orchestrated by God, they meant that the events that happened to Eliezer proved this. From here the Talmud (Moed Katan 18b) relates that this is the Torah source for the

מִיְהוָה יֵצֵא הַדְּבָר – כְּלוּמַר הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁאִירְעוּ לְךָ מוֹכִיחִים. וּמִכַּאֵן לְמַדְּנוּ (מוֹעֵד קָטָן י"ח): שְׁעִינֵן הַזּוּוּג הוּא נִגְזַר מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּעִינֵן שֶׁאִמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז"ל (סוֹטָה ב). אַרְבַּעִים יוֹם קוֹדֵם יִצְרַת הוֹלֵד בֵּת קוֹל יוֹצֵאת

concept that marriages are decreed in Heaven. Our Sages also taught this idea: “Forty days prior to the creation of the fetus, a Heavenly voice proclaims, ‘The daughter of so-and-so is destined to marry so-and-so.’” (Sotah 2a)

ואומרת בת פלוני לפלוני.

There is an additional reason that God orchestrated the spectacular Hashgachah Pratit of this shidduch. In order to lay the foundation for the pillars of the Jewish people and the world, Torah, Avodah (Divine Service) and Gemilut Chasadim (Acts of Kindness) (Pirkei Avot 1:2/Ethics of the Fathers). This is derived from the two gifts given by Eliezer to Rivkah after he recognized that she was to be the wife for Yitzchak.

#### 5. Bereishit 24:22 with Rashi – The symbolism of the nose ring and bracelets given to Rivkah.

After the camels finished drinking, Eliezer took a gold nose ring weighing a beka (and put it on Rivka’s nose), and placed two bracelets weighing ten gold shekels on her arms.

Rashi:

**beka:** An allusion to the shekels donated to the Temple by each Jew, “A Beka per person (which equals one-half Shekel)” [Shemot 38:26].

**Two Bracelets:** An allusion to the two Tablets that were joined together.

**Weighing Ten Gold (shekels):** Hinting to the Ten Commandments written on the Tablets.

ויהי כאשר כלו הגמלים לשתות ויקח האיש נזם זהב בקע משקלו ושני צמידים על ידיה עשרה זהב משקלם:

רש"י:

בקע - רמז לשקלי ישראל בקע לגלגלת:

ושני צמידים - רמז לשני לוחות מצומדות:

עשרה זהב משקלם - רמז לעשרת הדברות שבהן:

What deeper ideas about the Hashgachah Pratit of this shidduch are being communicated by these gifts?

#### 6. Maharal, Derech Chaim, Chapter 1:2, p. 29 – The nose ring and bracelets given to Rivkah are symbolic of the Temple service and the Ten Commandments.

Why did Eliezer hint to Rivka [through the particular gifts that he gave her] about [the Ten Commandments and the Temple sacrifices]? The answer is that he saw that Rivka was a doer of kind deeds, as it is written, “If I say to a girl, ‘Tip over your jug and let me have a drink,’ and she replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels,’ she will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak. [If there is such a girl,] I will know that You have granted a favor for my master.”

And Rashi comments that “designated” means that “she is fitting for him, for she will perform kind deeds and is worthy to enter the house of Avraham.” He hinted thus because if she had the trait of performing kind deeds, which is one of the pillars of the world, then she would be

ולמה היה מרמז דוקא דברים אלו. אבל פירוש זה מפני שראה שהיא (רבקה) גומלת חסדים, כמ"ש ואומר אליה הטי נא כדך ואשתה וגם גמליך אשקה אותה הוכחת לעבדך ליצחק ובה אדע כי עשית חסד עם אדוני.

ופרש"י ז"ל, אותה הוכחת: ראויה היא לו שתהא גומלת חסדים וכדאי היא ליכנס בביתו של אברהם, ורמז לה כיון שיש לה גמילות חסדים שהוא עמוד אחד ראויה היא ליצחק שיש לו עמוד העבודה שהוא עמוד השני, וראויה בשביל זה שיצא ממנה יעקב שיש לו עמוד ג' עמוד התורה... כי כל אלו עמודי עולם שייכים

suitable for Yitzchak who had the trait of service, another of the pillars of the world. It would be fitting therefore for them to produce Yaakov (Jacob), who would bring to the world the third pillar, that of Torah... These three human pillars of the world are connected to one another, as they represent the spiritual pillars of the world.

Also, regarding the Temple sacrifices it is written that they are “a pleasant aroma [to God].” This is why he hinted to the sacrifices by giving her a nose ring, something placed in the part of the body with the faculty of smell. And he further hinted to her about the two Tablets (of the Ten Commandments) by (giving her the bracelets) for her two hands. For the two Tablets parallel two hands, as it is written, “And the two Tablets were in my two hands...” They were given from the hand of God to the hand of Moshe. That is why each Tablet has five commandments on it, parallel to the five fingers on each hand. That is how Torah was hinted to by the two bracelets he put on her hands.

זה לזה ששלושתן עמודי עולם.

ומפני כי הקרבנות כתיב אצלם לריח ניחוח, לפיכך היה מרמז הקרבנות בנום זהב שהוא על האף ששייך ריח באף, והיה מרמז הלוחות בשתי ידיים, כי ב' הלוחות הם נגד ב' ידיים וכדכתיב (דברים ט') ושני לוחות הברית על שתי ידי, כי מידו של הקב"ה לידו של משה נתנו, וכנגד זה היו ב' לוחות ה' דברות בכל לוח כנגד ה' אצבעות היד, ולכך רמז התורה בב' צמידים על ידיה.

Rabbi Reuven Leuchter explains that the events leading to the shidduch of Rivkah and Yitzchak illustrate that all details are meaningful in terms of Hashgachah Pratit. However, this is only true for people as great as the *Avot*, our forefathers. But as far as the rest of us, we really can't expect to be able to interpret all the details of our life events. This will be only be possible in the **עתידי לבא** – the World to Come – when in retrospect we will begin to understand all the details of world events.

#### PART D. LIVELIHOOD

As important as God's intervention is in the historic process is God's regulation of the world's economy. Here again, we are taught that a major task of Divine Providence is determining each person's economic fortune and fitting it into God's overall plan.

##### 1. **Talmud Bavli, Niddah 16b – A person's economic fortunes are largely determined from the time of conception.**

Rav Chanina bar Pappa taught: The angel appointed on pregnancy ... takes the drop and brings it before God and says: “Master of the World, what will become of this drop? Will he be ... rich or poor?”

דריש ר' חנינא בר פפא אותו מלאך הממונה על ההריון ... ונוטל טפה ומעמידה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ואומר לפניו רבוננו של עולם טפה זו מה תהא עליה ... עשיר או עני.

In the same way in which God is involved in unfathomable calculations to bring about marriages, so too does He conduct economic life to give each person the desired livelihood. Such was also one of the lessons taught to the Roman matron above.

## 2. Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 118a with commentary of Rashbam – Livelihood takes a miracle.

A person's livelihood is as difficult (for God) as the splitting the Sea.

As the splitting of the Sea – That is, the incredible miracle that God does for people by providing their livelihood, is comparable to when He split the Sea before the Jewish people.

קשין מזונותיו של אדם כקריעת ים סוף

כקריעת ים סוף: כלומר גם גדול עושה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למי שנותן לו מזונות כאשר עשה לישראל שקרע להם ים סוף:

The degree of providence required to set each individual in his economic station is as great as that required to produce a miracle. This is especially true since wealth affects different people in different ways, and therefore cannot be granted on the basis of merit alone. For this reason, the key to wealth remains in God's hand alone, and even the righteous have no promise of livelihood.

## 3. Talmud Bavli, Taanit 2a-b – God holds the keys to livelihood.

Rabbi Yochanan said: God holds three keys that He does not give agency to anyone else. These are the key to rain, the key to life, and the key to resurrection of the dead... In the West (Israel), they said: also the key to livelihood, as the verse states, "You open Your hand (and satisfy the desire of every living thing)" [Tehillim/Psalms 145:16]. And why didn't Rabbi Yochanan count it? He would say to you that livelihood was already included in rain.

אמר רבי יוחנן: שלשה מפתחות בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו ביד שליח, ואלו הן: מפתח של גשמים, מפתח של חיה, ומפתח של תחיית המתים... במערבא אמרי: אף מפתח של פרנסה, דכתיב (תהלים קמה) פותח את ידך וגו'. ורבי יוחנן מאי טעמא לא קא חשיב להא? אמר לך: גשמים היינו פרנסה.

Like with marriage, the chain of events governing a person's economic fortunes is largely determined from the time of his conception. Besides this, however, each person is constantly judged, and his financial fortunes are determined, over periods of time. To this end, God makes a basic calculation on Rosh Hashanah as to what a person's livelihood will be for the coming year. However, this can be altered slightly based on actual daily performance.

## 4. Talmud Bavli, Beitzah 16a – God determines one's basic livelihood on Rosh Hashanah, except for the expenditures of certain mitzvot.

A person's entire livelihood is determined by God between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, except for the expenses of Shabbat, Yom Tov, and the tuition for his children's Torah education.

כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים, חוץ מהוצאת שבתות והוצאת יום טוב, והוצאת בניו לתלמוד תורה.

Using rain as a metaphor for livelihood as Rabbi Yochanan did above, we can understand how the allocation set on Rosh Hashanah can be changed based on our behavior throughout the year.

## 5. Talmud Bavli, Rosh HaShanah 17b – God's distribution of our livelihood can change based on our behavior.

"The eyes of God your Lord are on it [the Land of Israel] at all times," sometimes for the better and

(דברים יא) עיני ה' אלהיך בה - עתים לטובה עתים לרעה. עתים לטובה כיצד? הרי שהיו ישראל רשעים



sometimes for the worse. What does it mean “for the better”? Such as when the Jewish people were deemed completely wicked on Rosh Hashanah and were therefore assigned only sparse rain, but in the end they repent. To add to their allotment would be impossible, for it has already been decreed. Rather, God makes the little bit of rain fall at the time and place where it is needed most. “Sometimes for the worse” – how so? Such as when the Jewish people were deemed completely righteous on Rosh Hashanah and were allotted much rain, but then they strayed. To decrease the amount would be impossible for it has already been decreed. Rather, God makes the rain fall in the wrong place at the wrong time.

גמורין בראש השנה ופסקו להם גשמים מועטים, לסוף חזרו בהן, להוסיף עליהן אי אפשר, שכבר נגזרה גזרה. אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא מורידן בזמן על הארץ הצריכה להן, הכל לפי הארץ. עתים לרעה כיצד? הרי שהיו ישראל צדיקים גמורין בראש השנה, ופסקו עליהן גשמים מרובין, לסוף חזרו בהן, לפחות מהן אי אפשר, שכבר נגזרה גזרה. אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא מורידן שלא בזמן על הארץ שאינה צריכה להן.

God knows what is ultimately best for each person, and He measures out their livelihoods accordingly. Hence, people should appreciate that everything that they have is destined for them by God. The person who first taught us this lesson was our forefather Yaakov.

#### 6. Bereishit Rabba 32:25 – Yaakov put his possessions before his own safety.

Yaakov remained alone. A stranger [appeared and] wrestled with him until just before daybreak.

Why did he remain alone? Because he had forgotten some small jugs (which he had returned for by himself). This teaches that the righteous value their money more than their bodies.

ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר:

ולמה נשאר לפי ששכח פכים קטנים ללמדך שמחבבין הצדיקים ממונם יותר מגופם.

On second thought, is it reasonable that a person would endanger himself to retrieve personal possessions? What is the Midrash teaching?

#### 7. Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Salant, Be'er Yosef, Parshat Vayishlach – The righteous understand that their property is gifted by God for a reason.

Since this 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.

וכיון שמן השמים מושגח שאותו הדבר מתאים ומדוד במדה נכונה ומדוקדקת שיהיה שייך ויגיע לאותו איש, וא"כ הצדיקים יודעים להוקיר ולהחשיב כל דבר גדול או קטן שהגיע לידם מפני שהוא בהשגחה פרטית מן השמים שיהיה אותו הדבר שלהם, ובודאי שיש בו צורך לשלימותם ולכן אינם חסים על טרחם ועמלם ומתאמצים בכל היכולת שלא לאבד שום דבר השייך להם.

## PART E. MISFORTUNES

Not only does God shape the circumstances of our lives, but He also dictates and decrees everything that takes place over the course of our lives. This means, of course, that when we experience events that we consider fortunate, we must credit them to God. But it also means that we must perceive God's providence in circumstances that we consider unfortunate, and even in apparent accidents. Everything ultimately comes from God, and since we know that the purpose of God's providence is to benefit His creations, belief in Hashgachah Pratit should lead us to the recognition that even events that we perceive as unfortunate are really intended for our ultimate benefit.

### 1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 60b and Rashi s.v. *hakol latovah* (everything is for the good) – Even mishaps and setbacks are for the good, even if one cannot see how immediately.

It is taught in the name of Rabbi Akiva: “A person should accustom himself to always say: ‘Everything God does is for the good.’”

Once, Rabbi Akiva was traveling and arrived at a town. He asked to sleep at an inn, but they refused. Nevertheless he said, “Everything God does is for the good.” He slept that night in the fields. He had with him a rooster [to wake him in the morning], a donkey [for transport] and a lamp. A wind came and blew out his lamp. A wildcat ate the rooster. A lion ate the donkey. Now he had nothing, yet he said, “Whatever God does is for the good.”

Later that night the [Roman] army came and took the village captive.

#### **Rashi:**

[Rabbi Akiva commented to himself:] Had my lamp been burning [and not been blown out by the wind] the army would have seen me. Had my donkey brayed or my rooster crowed [and not been killed by wild animals], the army would have come and taken me captive.

וכן תנא משמיה דרבי עקיבא: לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד.

כי הא דרבי עקיבא דהוה קאזיל באורחא, מטא להדיא מתא, בעא אושפיזא לא יחי ליה. אומר: כל דעביד רחמנא לטב. אזל ובת בדברא, והוה בהדיה תרנגולא וחמרא ושרגא. אתא זיקא כבייה לשרגא, אתא שונרא אכליה לתרנגולא, אתא אריה אכליה לחמרא. אומר: כל דעביד רחמנא לטב.

ביה בליליא אתא גייסא, שבייה למתא.

רש"י סא. ד"ה הכל לטובה

אילו היה נר דלוק היה הגייס רואה אותי, ואילו היה החמור נוער או התרנגול קורא היה הגייס בא ושווה אותי.

Had Rabbi Akiva found a place to sleep in the village, or had the donkey, rooster, or lamp remained in his possession, the Romans would have discovered him. Following the example of Rabbi Akiva, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 230:5) rules that a person should always be in the habit of saying: “Everything that God does is for the good.”

Not every apparent misfortune, however, is followed by such a clear demonstration of why it was truly beneficial. Very often, unpleasant or unfortunate events take place and no “positive” reason ever becomes apparent. In such situations, it is important to draw on one's trust in God. A person must be aware that everything that happens to him is a result of God's decree – Hashgachah Pratit. With this awareness, he will come to realize that the events must be in his best interest, even if he will never understand how. They are simply part of exceedingly complex Divine calculations that may not be comprehensible to our limited mortal minds.

2. **Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (The Chazon Ish), Emunah v'Bitachon (Belief and Trust) 2:1 – Trust in God (*bitachon*) means realizing that nothing happens by chance.**

There is an ancient misconception rooted in the hearts of many with regard to *bitachon* [trust in God]...that when a person is confronted by any situation and his future is uncertain – with two possible paths [one good and the other not] before him – then he is required to rest assured that it will be good. [They claim that] if he will be doubtful and plan for the opposite, then he is lacking *bitachon*.

This is incorrect, for unless the future has been clarified by prophecy, the future is not definite, for who can know God's judgment or His deeds? Rather, *bitachon* means the clarity that nothing happens by chance and that every occurrence in this world is by God's proclamation.

טעות נושנת נתאזרחה בלב רבים במושג בטחון... בכל מקרה שפוגש האדם והעמידתו לקראת עתיד בלתי מוכרע ושני דרכים בעתיד, אחת טובה ולא שניה, כי בטח יהיה הטוב ואם מסתפק וחושש על היפוך הטוב הוא מחוסר בטחון.

ואין הוראה זו בבטחון נכונה, שכל שלא נתברר בנבואה גורל העתיד אין העתיד מוכרע, כי מי יודע משפטי ה' וגמולותיו ית'. אבל ענין הבטחון הוא האמון שאין מקרה בעולם, וכל הנעשה תחת השמש הכל בהכרזה מאתו יתברך...

It is the very fact that we are limited mortals, inherently unable to comprehend the broad reality of the universe of which God is aware, that makes us often unable to know the true reasons for the events that befall us.

3. **Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (The Chofetz Chaim), Sheim Olam, Chap. 3, pp. 10-11, footnote 3 – Although there is a limit to our understanding of every event in our lives, we can expect clarity in the future.**

A person comes to here [this world] for a few short years and he wants to have answers to all of his questions [about God's providence and his life experiences]...But his days are extremely brief, and he sees very little of the world and its matters, like a traveler wandering from place to place...

Since the knowledge of a person is so limited, he can't investigate all the actions of the King of Kings. A person therefore needs to walk with Him innocently, and to have *emunah* [belief] that every single thing He does is entirely for the best, since nothing bad comes from Above. Then he will certainly merit to see that, in the end, these very things were all good and kindness.

האדם בא לפה על רגעים אחדים כי כמה ימי שנותינו, והוא רוצה לידע תירוץ על כל הקושיות שיש לו... אבל עתה שימי האדם קצרים מאד ואינו רואה את העולם ועניניה, כי אם מעט מזער, כאכסנאי העובר ממקום למקום...

וכיון שדעת האדם מעוטה כל כך אין לנו לחקור אחר הנהגתו של מלך מלכי מלכים הקב"ה, וצריך האדם להתהלך עמו בתמימות ולהאמין שכל מה שהוא עושה הוא הכל לטובה כי מפני עליון לא תצא הרעות, ואז בודאי יזכה לראות בסוף באלה דברים גופה שהיה הכל רב טוב וחסד...

Keeping this in mind, we can understand that belief in Hashgachah Pratit is a fundamental component of dealing with suffering. Whenever a person experiences tribulations, his anguish can be eased if he reminds himself that whatever happens to him was decreed by God for reasons that he may not understand, but are ultimately for his benefit. See further the Morasha shiur, *Toward Understanding Suffering & Adversity*.

**PART F. LIFESPAN****1. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. 2, 19:39-43 – A person's lifespan is determined by God and can be lengthened by great merit.**

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 God is taken in judgment [Berachot 46b] according to what will do him the most spiritual good [Bereishit Rabbah 62:5].

When God desires that a person leave the world, nothing can stand in the way of his death. On the other hand, when God wishes to extend a person's life, nothing can prevent that either. Every action, every event of a person's life, even the seemingly insignificant movement of one's fingers, are guided by God (Chofetz Chaim on the Morning Blessings; Chullin 7b) and can even have far-reaching effects. The following story is a dramatic, life-saving illustration of this.

*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. (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, The Maggid Speaks, p. 224)*

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:**

- ∞ Apart from controlling all the elements of nature, God arranges tailor-made life situations for every person.
- ∞ Therefore, a person's hereditary traits, environment and parents are determined at the time of conception. The moment of birth is determined precisely by God. Following birth, all aspects of bodily functioning – from fine motor control to every hair follicle – are under God's constant awareness and maintenance.
- ∞ From before birth, a chain of events is set up that will lead to his eventual marriage. A person's income and economic status are regulated by God in accord with what is best for the person.
- ∞ A person's lifespan is also determined by providence.

## CLASS SUMMARY:

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### HOW DO I SEE GOD’S PROVIDENCE? IS HE REALLY “TALKING TO ME” THROUGH EVENTS IN MY LIFE?

In order to see God’s providence in the world, you must make an effort to look for it. God will only allow His providence to be revealed to a person who demonstrates an interest in seeking him behind the mask of nature. But if you become aware of God’s providence, then you will see that He really does send messages through events that occur in your life. There are countless incidents from which you can derive a lesson or a message and understand that God is trying to tell you what to do, or which direction your life should take.

### DOES JUDAISM BELIEVE IN FATE? IF SO, CAN IT BE CHANGED?

Judaism does maintain that many aspects of our personal lives have been determined by God and are for the most part out of our control. Health, wealth and longevity are just some of the factors that make up our lot in life. This lot has been preordained by God to provide us with the challenge of using our freewill to choose “the good.” Nevertheless, through prayer and accrued spiritual merit one can change a so-called “bad” fortune into a better one.

### AREN’T CHANGES IN ECONOMIES AND MY PAYCHECK RANDOM?

Nothing in the world is random. God runs both the global economy and every individual’s personal finances, along with all the other details of every person’s life. It is God’s Hand, so to speak, that is pulling the strings behind every historical event and behind everything that happens to an individual. God orchestrates the events of a person’s life in order to place him in the individually-designed circumstances in which he can carry out his mission in the world.

### WHAT ABOUT ACCIDENTS AND MISHAPS? ARE THOSE ALSO PART OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE?

Let’s answer with a question: if God is aware of every detail of existence and in control of all those details, how *could* anything be an accident? The answer is that nothing is “just an accident.” Even if one is unable to immediately see and understand why God caused events to unfold in a particular manner, nothing happens by chance in the world. Understanding this intellectually, and internalizing it in one’s emotional life, is a character trait called *bitachon*, trust in God.

Even though Rabbi Akiva lost everything, and didn’t understand why God had orchestrated events in such a manner, he kept saying “Everything that God does is for the good,” because he understood deeply that even apparent accidents are part of God’s Providence.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING

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### PROVIDENCE IN GENERAL

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Emunah Ve-Hashgachah, Volume 1, Maamar Aleph

### SPECIFIC MANIFESTATIONS OF PROVIDENCE

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

### FOR A DETAILED DISCUSSION ON HOW SUFFERING IS PART OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE:

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Derech Hashem (2:2:5, 2:3:3, 5, 8)

Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner, Making Sense of Suffering