

Does G-d care about me?

- Where is this question coming from?
 - For most people, it is very difficult to sense Hashem's involvement in their lives.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף י עמוד א

מה הקדוש ברוך הוא רואה ואינו נראה - אף נשמה רואה ואינה נראית.

Talmud, Tractate Berachot 10a

Just like the Holy One, Blessed is He sees and cannot be seen, so too the soul sees but cannot be seen.

- G-d cannot be seen and therefore it simply seems like He is not around. "Out of sight, out of mind".
 - In addition, there is so much going on in the world that a person may think that his own life and particular struggles are lost in the shuffle. How can a G-d that is so grand be concerned with me, someone so small?
- Does G-d care about me?
 - Yes. G-d has a special interest in every person that He created.

רמב"ן שמות פרק כ פסוק ב

ונאמרו כל הדברות כלן בלשון יחיד, ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך, ולא כאשר התחיל להם אתם ראתם וגו', אם שמעו תשמעו (לעיל יט ד ה), להזהיר כי כל יחיד מהם יענש על המצות, כי עם כל אחד ידבר, ולכל אחד יצוה שלא יחשבו כי אחר הרוב ילך והיחיד ינצל עמהם.

Ramban, Commentary to Torah, Shemot 20:2

And all of the commandments were said in the singular language, 'Hashem your G-d (singular), Who took you out (singular)...,' and not as He began to them, 'you have seen (plural)...,' 'if you will hear (plural)...,' in order to warn them that every individual from among them will be punished for [transgressing] the mitzvot. Because with every one He spoke, and to every one he commanded, so that they should not think they after the majority they will go and the individual will be saved with them.

- All of the 10 Commandments were said in the singular tense because *Hashem spoke to each person individually at Har Sinai*. No one is overlooked as simply part of the larger group. Hashem knows what makes

each of us an individual, different from everyone else, and He cares very much about each of our unique situations in life.

עלי שור (ר' שלמה ולבה) חלק ב' עמ' תצט

עם כל יחיד מישראל קשר הקב"ה קשר אמיץ בל-יתנק. הוא ית' אמר לי ולך ולכל אחד מישראל 'אנכי אלקיך', ואנו פונים אליו ואומרים לו 'אלקי!' לכל אחד מישראל יש יחס אישי אל הבורא, כמו שיש לבורא ית' השגחה אישית על כל אחד מישראל!

Alei Shor (Rav Shlomo Volbe), vol. 2, pg. 499

With each individual Jew Hashem forged a strong bond that will not be broken. He said to me, to you, and to every Jewish person, 'I am your G-d!' and we turn to Him and say, 'My G-d!' To each individual Jew there is a personal relationship with the Creator, just like the Creator has divine providence over each individual Jew.

- Each of us has personal connection to G-d. He wants to have a unique relationship with each and every one of us. A relationship means that there are two sides that care about one another (and that actually communicate with one another, more on this below).
- It also means that my relationship with G-d is unlike anyone else's. Think about the various relationships you have. To each person you speak differently and there are certain things you would and would not say. So too with G-d, there is a different way in which only you relate to him: *your* way.
- Why does G-d care about me so much? Does He really need me?
 - G-d doesn't really "need" anything. Nonetheless, He wants to become close to you. Why?
 - Well, why did G-d create you? It wasn't because He *needed* to do so. Rather, it was because He *wanted* to do so. Why did He want this?
 - Because G-d is perfect, meaning that He possesses all good qualities that anyone can possibly have. One of these qualities is being a *baal chesed*, one who has the desire to give to others. Therefore, G-d wanted to create someone that He could give to.

דעת תבונות (רמח"ל) סי' יח עמ' ד'

מחק הטוב הוא להטיב, וזה הוא מה שרצה הוא ית"ש – לברוא נבראים כדי שיוכל להיטיב להם, כי אם אין מקבל הטוב – אין הטובה.

Da'at Tevunot (Ramchal), pg. 4, no. 18

Among the laws of [being] good is to give good [to others]. And this is what Hashem wanted – to create creations in order that He would be able to give to them, because if there is no recipient of good – there can be no giving of it.

דרך ה' (רמח"ל) חלק א פרק ב:א

הנה, תכלית בבריאה היה להטיב מטובו יתברך שמו לזולתו.

Derech Hashem (Ramchal), sec. 1, chap. 2:1

Behold, the purpose of creation was to give of His good to another.

ברכת המזון

המלך הטוב והמטיב לכל שבכל יום ויום הוא הטיב הוא מטיב הוא יטיב לנו...

Grace After Meals

The King who is good and who does good for all, that each and every day he did good, he does good, he will do good for us...

תהילים קמה:ט (אשרי)

טוב ה' לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו.

Psalms 145:9 (Ashrei)

Hashem is good to all, and His mercies are on all His works.

- So, what did G-d decide to give to us?

דרך ה' חלק א פרק ב:א

ועל כן בהיות חפצו ית' להטיב לזולתו, לא יספיק לו בהיותו מטיב קצת טוב, אלא בהיותו מטיב תכלית הטוב שאפשר לברואים שיקבלו. ובהיותו הוא לבדו ית' הטוב האמיתי, לא יסתפק חפצו הטוב אלא בהיותו מהנה לזולתו בטוב ההוא עצמו שהוא בו ית' מצד עצמו, שהוא הטוב השלם והאמיתי.

Derech Hashem, sec. 1, chap. 2:1

Therefore, since His desire was to give to another, it would not have been enough for Him to give a partial good. Rather, He would [have to] give the ultimate good that His creations could accept. And since He alone is the only true good, His desire to give good would not be fulfilled unless He would give the good of Himself, because He is the true perfect good.

- One who is truly a giver wants to give the best thing that he can. And what's the best thing that G-d can possibly give to us?
Answer: Himself.

- How does G-d give Himself to us?

דרך ה' (שם)

והנה מצד אחר, הטוב הזה אי אפשר שימצא אלא בו, על כן גזרה חכמתו שמציאות ההטבה האמיתית הזאת יהיה במה שינתן מקום לברואים לשיתדבקו בו ית', באותו השיעור שאפשר להם שיתדבקו... ונמצא היות כונתו ית"ש בבריאה שברא, לברוא מי שיהיה נהנה בטובו ית' באותו הדרך שאפשר שיהנה בו:

Derech Hashem, ibid.

On the other hand, this good cannot be found other than in Him. Therefore, His wisdom decreed that the way of this true giving would be to give the opportunity for creations to cling to Him, to the degree that it is possible for them to cling to Him... It emerges that G-d's intention in what He created was to create someone that could benefit from His goodness in the way that it is possible for it to benefit.

- Hashem gives Himself to us by giving us the chance to connect and come close to Him. The purpose of creating us is for us to have the chance to receive the greatest thing possible – being close to G-d, having an intimate relationship with Him. That's why we're in this world.
 - (And that's why everything else in the world was created as well, see Derech Hashem, sec. 1, chap. 2:5. All of creation is here in order to help us reach our goal.)
- Now we understand why G-d cares about us so much. The entire world is based on the idea of *chesed*. One aspect of being a *baal chesed* is that you are constantly concerned about the wellbeing of others. G-d is always thinking about us and only wants what's best for us. What's best for us is to come as close to Him in our lifetimes as we can.
 - How do we come close? G-d Himself tells us how.

ישעיהו פרק מז פסוק יז

כה אמר יקוק גאלך קדוש ישראל אני יקוק אלהיך מלמדך להועיל מדריךך בדרך תלך:

Isiah 48:17

...I am Hashem, your G-d, Who instructs you for [your] benefit, Who guides you in the way you should follow.

תהלים פרק טז פסוק יא

תודיעני ארח חיים שבע שמחות את פניך נעמות בימינך נצח:

Psalms 16:11

You will make known to me the path of life...

- If we want to know how to come close to Hashem, we need look no further than our own Torah. The Torah is a blueprint for how to live a life of striving for closeness with Hashem.
 - (Note: A principle can be learned from here. Before looking to other sources to provide us with meaning, one should at least give the Torah a chance. It's always possible that it contains the answers to our questions.)
- Why does coming close to Hashem have to be so hard? Wouldn't G-d want to make it easy for us?

ספר האמונות והדעות מאמר ג

שהשכל דן שיהיה מי שמגיע לטובה על מעשה שהעבד בו, יש לו כפל מה שיגיעהו מן הטוב מי שלא עשה דבר, אבל הוא מתחסד עמו.

Emunot V'Deot (Rav Saadya Ga'on), ma'amar 3

Reason dictates that one who reaches goodness through actions that he has performed receives much more than one who reaches goodness without doing anything, i.e. than if it is simply given to him.

- This idea is also echoed by the Ramchal:

דעת תבונות סי' יח עמ' ה'

כדי שתהיה ההטבה הטבה שלימה, ידע בחכמתו הנשגבה שראוי שיהיו המקבלים אותה [את הטוב] – מקבלים אותה ביגיע כפם, כי אז יהיו הם בעלי הטוב ההוא.

Daat Tevunot, pg. 5, no. 18

In order for the goodness [that man receives] to be complete goodness, His Ultimate Wisdom knew that it is proper for they who receive it to work for it, because then they will be owners of it.

- Parable of parent and child. The parent only wants what is best for the child. But, if everything is given to the child and it is not earned, that's not best for the child.
- What about every little detail? Are they all important too?
 - In a relationship the details are the most important part. The moment we stop investing in the relationship, we start feeling distant.
 - Illustration #1: Which causes a wife to love her husband more – writing her a check or remembering her birthday? The first may be worth more money but the latter shows that he really cares. Paying attention to the details shows that the other's entire life is important to you, not just the major points. So too it is in our relationship with G-d. We show that He is important to us by paying close attention to all aspects of our relationship with Him.
 - Illustration #2: In order to send an e-mail, the entire system of technology must work. If one "." is missing, the message won't get through. So too it is with our relationship with G-d. If we don't pay attention to all the details, the lines of communication between us will not be open. There is a formula that He has given us for coming close to Him – Torah. We must be willing to follow the guidelines if we want to make it happen.
- Is this relationship relevant nowadays? Did G-d speak to me once at Har Sinai and that was it? Can I speak back to Him?
 - The relationship is very relevant. The first step is for us to open our eyes and notice G-d's involvement in our lives.
 - A person must listen to his messages. G-d is trying to communicate with each and every one of us.

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי בכל יום ויום בת קול יוצאת מהר חורב ומכרזת ואומרת אוי להם לבריות מעלבונה של תורה...

Ethics of our Fathers 6:2

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Every single day a heavenly voice emanates from Har Chorev, proclaiming and saying, 'Woe to them, to the people, because of [their] insult to the Torah!'

- What is this *mishna* talking about? Have any of us ever heard a voice from heaven saying anything whatsoever?
 - The answer is that those who are tuned into the correct frequency hear it. If you open your ears and listen, you will realize that G-d is sending you messages all the time.
 - Many things that happen to us in life could be understood as mere coincidences, or it could be G-d's ways of trying to tell us something.
 - The Sfat Emet points out that when Hashem said the words "lech lecha" (*Bereishit 12:1*), they were spoken to the entire world. However, Avraham Avinu was the only one who stopped to listen.
- The second step is to speak to Hashem, to engage Him in conversation.
 - This is one of the main focuses of davening.

שערים בתפילה עמ' כב

והיסוד בזה הוא, דתפילה הוא כביכול שיחה והידברות קרובה עם השי"ת.

She'arim B'Tefilah (Rav Shimshon Dovid Pinkus), pg. 22

The fundamental principle here is that prayer is a close conversation with Hashem.

- A person must remember that as much as we want to feel the warmth of being close to Hashem, He wants it even more. He wants us to involve Him in every aspect of our lives, because that will allow us to come as close as possible to Him. That is the greatest reward possible for man to receive.

Source Biographies

Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nacham, 1194-1270, excerpt adapted from Pardes Project)

Besides the Rambam, the Ramban was probably the greatest and most influential of the *Rishonim* (early commentators). Born in Gerona, he remained there for most of his life. Like the Rambam, he was equally distinguished in both *halacha* and *machshava* (Jewish thought). His authored works cover every area of Jewish scholarship. He wrote major works defending the Rif against the critique of the Baal Ha'Meor and defending the Rambam against the Behag's criticism regarding classification of *mitzvot*. The Ramban wrote masterful works of *halacha* such as *Torat Ha'adom* on the laws of death and mourning, which also included a philosophical section called *Shaar Ha'gemul*. He committed to writing down lectures he had given on fundamental topics such as Rosh Hashanah, Ecclesiastes, and Torah learning. The Ramban's written account of his public disputation in Barcelona with the convert Pablo Christiani in 1263 is also well-known. He is known to have composed poetry as well.

Probably the most popular of the Ramban's works is his Commentary on Chumash. The commentary is multi-dimensional and included all methods of interpretation from simple meaning to esoteric aspects of *kabbalah*. Many of the Ramban's explanations have become basic principles of Jewish belief.

The Ramban held that the commandment to settle in the Land of Israel applies even today and ultimately settled there himself during the last year of his life. When he arrived in Yerushalayim there was hardly a *minyan* of people and he wrote that "what had been the most sacred is now the most desecrated." He organized a *minyan* and erected a synagogue in what is now the Jewish quarter of the Old City.

Rav Shlomo Volbe (1914-2005, excerpt adapted from Wikipedia)

Rav Shlomo Volbe was raised in an irreligious home and received his education at the University of Berlin (1930-1933), where he became a *baal teshuvah*. After university he attended the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin and then moved on to the Mir yeshiva in Poland, where he became a close student of the *Mashgiach Ruchani*, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz. While in Mir, Rav Volbe also learned under Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein.

During World War II, Rav Volbe could not follow the Mir yeshiva to Russia and spent the war years in neutral Sweden, where he functioned as a rabbi. At the end of the war he created a girls school for refugees in Lidinge. While in Sweden, he wrote pamphlets on Judaism in Swedish and German.

Rav Volbe moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1946 and studied at the Lomzha Yeshivah and then at Kollel Torat Eretz Yisrael, both in Petach Tikva. He married the daughter of Rabbi Avrohom Grodzenski of the Slabodka Yeshiva. In 1948, Rav Volbe joined Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Shapira of Brisk and opened the Be'er Yaakov Yeshiva, where Rav Volbe served as the *Mashgiach Ruchani* for more than 35 years. He subsequently served as *Mashgiach*

in the Lakewood Yeshivah in Yerushalayim. Later, Rav Volbe opened Yeshivat Givat Shaul, which specialized in the study of *mussar*. Beginning in 1984, Rav Volbe gave *mussar* ‘shmoozin’ in various yeshivot and to small groups. He also created many “*mussar* houses”. He is best known for his *mussar* work *Alei Shor*, and was a pioneer in the field of education. His other works include *Z’ria U’Binyan B’Chinuch*, *Bein Sheshet L’Asor*, *Olam HaYedidut*, and *Pirkei Kinyan Daat*.

Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, 1707-1746, excerpt adapted from Pardes Project)

Born in Padua, Italy, into a distinguished family, the Ramchal’s genius was obvious from a very early age. Besides his complete mastery of the entire Biblical, Rabbinic, and Kabbalistic literature, he was thoroughly educated in the science and literature of the time. He authored three full length plays, which have subsequently been published in modern editions. Unfortunately, his preoccupation with *kabbalah* and the impact he made on the young aroused opposition and false suspicion of Sabbatean influence. About 70 years ago a huge cache of letters was found which describes at length in the Ramchal’s own words the persecution that he endured.

Eventually the Ramchal left Italy and settled in Amsterdam. In 1740, at the age of 33, he published perhaps his most famous work, the *Mesilat Yesharim*. It is a moving, inspiring work which describes how a thoughtful Jew may climb the ladder of purification until he attains the level of holiness. In 1743, the Ramchal left for Eretz Yisrael with his family. Little is known of his life in Eretz Yisrael and, just a few years after his arrival, he and his family perished in a plague.

The Ramchal’s profound spirituality continues to touch and inspire Jews of all groups. Both the Vilna Ga’on and the Maggid of Mezritch (i.e. Litvakim and Chassidim alike) were great admirers.

Rav Saadya Gaon (882-942, excerpt adapted from Wikipedia)

Rav Saadya Gaon was a prominent rabbi, Jewish philosopher, and exegete in the period of the Geonim. He is known for his works on Hebrew linguistics, *halacha*, and Jewish philosophy. His principle philosophical work, *Emunot V’Deot*, completed in 933, represents the first systematic attempt to integrate Jewish theology with components of Greek philosophy. Rav Saadya Gaon was also very active in defending rabbinic Judaism against the opposing beliefs of the Karaite movement.

Rav Saadya Gaon was born in Egypt but left home at a young age to study under the Torah scholars of Tiberias. At age 20 he completed his first great work, a Hebrew dictionary. At 23 he composed a polemic which would prove to be an important work in his fight against Karaism. In the same year he decided to settle permanently in Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Saadya was appointed as Gaon of Sura, in Bavel, in 928. Under his leadership, the ancient academy, founded by Rav, entered a new period of brilliancy. In his work entitled *Sefer HaGalui* he emphasizes with pride the services he rendered during this time, especially in his battle against heresy.

Sfat Emet (Rebbe Yehudah Leib Alter, 1847-1905, excerpt adapted from Pardes Project)

The Sfat Emet was the second Rebbe of the Gerer Chassidim and grandson of the Chiddushei HaRim. He was orphaned at the age of one and raised by his grandfather. He was a child prodigy and studied without interruption for eighteen hours at a time. When he was nineteen, his grandfather passed away and pressure was exerted on him to assume the mantle of leadership of the Gerer Chassidim. He felt very unworthy however, and instead went to Alexandria to study under Rebbe Chanoch Henoah. After only four years, Rebbe Chanoch Henoah passed away, and Reb Yehudah Leib was left with no choice but to comply with the wishes of the Chassidim for him to become the leader of Ger. Under his guidance and leadership Ger became the largest Chassidic group in Poland. The Sfat Emet, named after his magnum opus, was a proponent of expanding the Chassidic community in Israel, and greatly supported activities to that end. His son, the Imrei Emet, escaped the Nazis, came to Israel and rebuilt Ger, restoring it to its former glory.

Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus (1944-2001, excerpt adapted from Wikipedia)

In his early years, Rav Pincus learned in the Beit HaTalmud Yeshiva in New York under Rav Aryeh Leib Mallen. Afterwards, he made *aliyah* to Israel to learn in the Brisk yeshiva under Rav Berel Solovetichik, the son of the Brisker Rav. After his marriage, Rav Pincus lived in Bnei Brak and then in the Negev. During this time he served as the *Mashgiach* of the yeshiva in Ofaqim. He later became the Rosh Yeshiva in Yerucham. At the request of Rav Elazar Shach and Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, Rav Pincus accepted the position of Chief Rabbi of Ofaqim, where he served for over twenty years.

Rabbi Pincus and his wife, Mindel had 12 children. His wife was an administrator in the religious high school "Neve Yocheved" for girls in Ofaqim. In 2001, at the age of 56, Rabbi Pincus was killed in a tragic car accident, along with his wife and 18 year-old daughter, Miriam. They are buried in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Pincus was renowned as an expert in exegetical understandings of Torah passages. People from far and wide attended his famous lectures which were recorded on cassette tapes, many of which were later transcribed and published after Rabbi Pincus's untimely death. Among his books are: *Nefesh Shimshon*, *Sha'arim B'Tefillah*, *Brachot B'Chesbon*, *Shabbat Malk'ta*, *Hagada Shel Pesach (Tiferet Shimshon)*, *Sichot HaRav Shimshon Dovid Pincus*, *Tiferet Avot*, and *Ohel Miriam*.