

*Hashem's Divine Presence and Providence*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) presents his 13 principles of faith in his introduction to the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Mishnah Sanhedrin*. The eighth and ninth of these theological precepts are the G-d-given origin of the Torah (*Torah min hashamayim*), and its immutability. They teach us that it was the Almighty who gave us the Torah, wherein every word and verse is a pearl of wisdom waiting to be discovered and analyzed. As such, when we encounter what appears to be an extra word, or some other seeming textual anomaly, we must try to understand the reason for the unusual formulation.

The final verse of our *parasha* (*Sefer Bamidbar* 15:41) that serves, as well, as the last verse of the three paragraphs comprising the recitation of *Kriat Shema* (*Shema Yisrael*), contains a seemingly unnecessary repetition: "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem, your G-d." (Translation, *The Artscroll Tanach*) The question to be asked is, "Why is the phrase 'I am Hashem, your G-d' repeated?" This apparent repetition was noted during the Mishnaic period in the halachic Midrash to Bamidbar known as the *Sifrei*, and during the Talmudic period in *Talmud Bavli*, *Menachot* 44a. The explanations are virtually identical. The passage in the *Sifrei* reads as follows:

Hashem *Elokeinu* commanded us a relatively easy commandment to perform. And it is stated ‘I am Hashem, your G-d I am Hashem, your G-d’ two times.’ One time refers to the idea that Hashem will reward [those who deserve reward] in the future, and the second time refers to the idea that Hashem will punish [those who deserve punishment] in the future.

According to the *Sifrei* and the *Talmud Bavli*, the repetition teaches us the idea of *s’char v’ onesh* (reward and punishment). Each one of us will one day stand *din v’ cheshbon* (the ultimate accounting) before our Maker. Nothing will go unnoticed, and nothing will be disregarded. Hashem will “replay” our lives to us in the minutest detail and, for once, all our sophisticated rationalizations will be meaningless. On the positive side, however, all of our merits and even our positive thoughts will come to our defense when Hashem determines our ultimate fate.

A holistic and quite novel interpretation of the reiteration of the phrase “I am Hashem, your G-d” is found in the great Chasidic work, *Kedushat Levi*, written by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak ben Meir of Berdichev, Russia (1740-1810). “The Berdichever,” as Jews fondly and respectfully know him throughout the world, is famous for advocating on our behalf before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One blessed be He). He begins his analysis of our verse by focusing on a fundamental theological and philosophical principle of Torah living: “The general rule is that man must always be conscious that all of his words, thoughts, and actions [literally “movements”] make an impression in Heaven.” In other words, Hashem is fully cognizant of everything we do. We must remember that every act that we perform is recorded, as it were, in Hashem’s ledger. This concept, in turn, leads us to be “mindful of our words, thoughts, and actions,” since they create an indelible impression before Him. The knowledge that nothing is ever forgotten or glossed over should, in the Berdichiver’s view, instill a sense of awe within us, since “Hashem, may

He be blessed, knows all of man's thoughts... [and] His Divine Providence (*hashgacha pratit*) is omnipresent and over all mankind." Rav Yitzhak Levi continues and weaves the interpretation of our verse into his stirring words:

And this is the essence of the service of man toward G-d that he recognize and be fully knowledgeable that Hashem, may He be blessed, has His Divine Providence upon him and upon all of his ways. This is what the Torah means when it says "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you" [G-d as our Redeemer] and that you must be fully cognizant of "I am Hashem, your G-d" as referring to Hashem as He who ever exercises His Divine Providence upon us.

In order to fully appreciate the depth of the Berdichiver's analysis, we need to briefly focus upon the concept of *hashgacha pratit*. Once again, we are fortunate in that we can turn to Maimonides for his classic elucidation of this concept:

It is likewise one of the fundamental principles of the Law of *Moses our Master* that it is in no way possible that He, may He be exalted, should be unjust, and that all the calamities that befall men and the good things that come to men, be it a single individual or a group, are all of them determined according to the deserts of the men concerned through equitable judgment in which there is no injustice whatsoever... Thus He, may He be exalted says: *For all His ways are judgment, and so on.*" (*The Guide of the Perplexed*, translation from the Arabic, Shlomo Pines, vol. III: 17, page 469, underlining my own)

Thus, for the Rambam, Divine Providence is the holistic term for the implementation e of *s'char v' onesh*.

I believe these sources teach us an invaluable lesson. Rather than trading authentic happiness for momentary pleasure, we are commanded to know before Whom we stand – each and every moment of our lives. By definition, Hashem is an immanent part of our lives, since His Divine Providence is over each of us. Ultimately, then, our relationship with our Creator, coupled with the relationships we share with our families and friends, endows our lives with true meaning and value.

May Hashem grant us the strength and insight to search for Him and enrich our lives with the knowledge of His Divine Presence and Providence. . *V'chane yihi ratzon*

Shabbat Shalom

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\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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