



Likkutei Sichos

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For Hashem To Focus Attention

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Note: In the original translation, endnotes were used in place of footnotes, and they remain in that format in this presentation as well.

A note on the translation: As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. **Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org**

1.

This week's Torah reading relates that when G-d told Moshe and Aharon:¹ "Separate yourselves from this congregation, and I will consume them this moment," they pleaded with Him:² "G-d, L-rd of spirits for all flesh: Will one person sin and You become enraged against the entire congregation?!"

Moshe and Aharon addressed G-d as "G-d, L-rd of spirits for all flesh," using this description as a preface to their plea: "Will one person sin and You become enraged against the entire congregation?!"

In his commentary to that verse, Rashi explains that the name "L-rd of spirits," indicates that G-d "knows [all] thoughts." Hence, since "all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is, [is it fitting that] one person sin and You become enraged against the entire congregation?!"³

[Hearing this argument,] "the Holy One, blessed be He, answered: 'You have spoken well.⁴ I know and will make known who has sinned and who has not sinned.' "

A question, nevertheless, arises: Why was it necessary to refer to G-d as "L-rd of spirits for all flesh"? Seemingly, since ["L-rd of spirits" itself indicates that G-d knows all thoughts,] why was the term "for all flesh" added?

Moreover, the use of that term raises a further question: The Jerusalem Talmud⁵ states: "Whether a person hears G-d's name being cursed by a Jew or by a gentile, he is obligated to rend his garments. What is the source? 'I am G-d, the L-rd of all flesh.'"⁶ This indicates that the term "(L-rd) of all flesh" includes also gentiles. What connection does the fact that G-d knows the thoughts of gentiles ("all flesh") share with Moshe's plea: "Will one person sin and You become enraged against the entire congregation?!"⁷

Seemingly, when Avraham pleaded with G-d not to destroy Sodom: "Will You obliterate the righteous with the wicked,"⁸ it would have been appropriate for him to refer to Him as "the L-rd of all flesh," for he was speaking with regard

to gentiles. Avraham, however, did not refer to this phrase, concluding instead: “Will not the Judge of the entire earth act justly?”⁹

2.

To resolve the above: In general, the plea of Moshe and Aharon was based on the conception that G-d in His knowledge and in His Divine providence clearly knows who was the (actual) sinner among Korach’s company and that there was only one person [who rebelled in that manner], as Rashi states “One man is the sinner.”

As was explained once at length,¹⁰ this is reflected in the explanation of the parable Rashi uses here: “There was a mortal king against whom a portion of the nation trespassed. He does not know who the wrongdoer is. Therefore when he becomes angry, he exacts retribution from all of them. But You, by contrast,... know who the sinner is.” Korach’s company were not sinners with an intent to rebel against G-d. They were merely enticed and led astray by Korach.¹¹ Hence, they should not be judged as “sinners,” merely as “people who acted offensively,” a milder transgression.

Thus the basis of Moshe’s and Aharon’s plea was: Since G-d “knows (all) thoughts,” He can differentiate between a sinner and a person who acted offensively. There was only one “sinner” who rebelled against G-d (“Will one person sin?” and “One man is the sinner”). He was the one who caused (and is therefore responsible for) the offensive acts of the entire congregation. As such, it is appropriate that G-d make a distinction between the punishment received by those who acted offensively and the “sinner.”

{On this basis, we can appreciate why Avraham did not preface his plea [for the people of Sodom] with the phrase “L-rd of spirits” (or the like). [Abraham] was speaking of a distinction between a righteous man and a wicked person. (Such a distinction is apparent; it depends on deed, [not on thought].) No mention was made of some merely “acting offensively,” and thus requiring a distinction to be made between those who “acted offensively” and sinners.”}

3.

On this basis, we can appreciate the precision of the wording used by Rashi in his restatement of Moshe's claim: "knows [all] thoughts," and "You know who the sinner is," and also in his restatement of G-d's response: "I know," instead of using the expression frequently used by our Sages:¹² "It is revealed and known¹³ before He who spoke and the world came into being."¹⁴ Indeed, Rashi himself begins stating: "All thoughts are revealed before You." Seemingly, it would have been appropriate for him to conclude using a similar expression: "It is known before You."¹⁵

The resolution of this question is explained as follows: As is well known,¹⁶ there are two levels of Divine knowledge and (providence):

a) a level at which the knowledge (and providence) is "revealed and known." [G-d does not actively] invest Himself in the world. Instead, "everything is revealed and known before Him in an effortless manner." Although this knowledge encompasses every particular element of existence, it remains above [active] investment in the created beings. Indeed, it is separate from them. Therefore it relates to every created being equally. It is on a plane so high that the deeds of the created beings cannot bring about negative consequences,¹⁷ as it were, nor are the differences in the spiritual levels of those beings of any consequence.

b) Divine knowledge (and providence) which actively invests itself to know [the different events and happenings of this world]. On this level, there are differences with regard to His knowledge (and providence) according to the spiritual level of every created being. The reward and punishment which an earthly being receives for his conduct stems from this level of knowledge.¹⁸

For this reason, Rashi carefully chose the term "knows" (instead of using the passive). His intent was to point to a level of Divine knowledge and providence that becomes the source for reward and punishment. Moreover, this knowledge involves active investment, [that G-d] involve Himself, as it were, in

the particular events concerning Korach's revolt and make known who merely acted offensively, and who was "the sinner."

4.

As is well known (in Moreh Nevuchim¹⁹), the Rambam states that Divine providence relates only to humans in a particular way, i.e., the fate of every individual man is controlled by His providence. With regard to inanimate matter, plants, and animals, by contrast, His providence controls the fate of the species as a whole, but not the fate of every particular member of the species.

Moreover, even with regard to humans, G-d's providence does not relate to all equally, but instead, is dependent the manner in which each person clings to G-d with his mind.²⁰ G-d removes His particular providence from the "fools who rebel" and the wicked who do not cling to Him with their minds and He manifests His providence over them in the same manner as He does over inanimate matter, plants, and animals, i.e., His providence is general in nature. {This is alluded to by the verse:²¹ "He (a sinner) is comparable to the animals who cannot speak."}

This motif is reflected in the verse:²² "I will conceal My face from them... and many evils and difficulties will be visited upon [the nation]... It will say: 'It is because G-d is not in my midst that all these evils have found me.'" For when Jews cut themselves off from G-d, they are "given over to circumstance."²³ Evils "visit themselves upon them," i.e., they appear to come on their own initiative [without having their source in G-d's decree].²⁴

According to this view, G-d manifests His providence over the wicked in the same manner as He does over inanimate matter, plants, and animals; i.e., His providence is general in nature. Therefore, even when retribution is meted out to such people from above, He does not relate to them individually, but in a general way. This applies [even when a wicked person suffers difficulties] which obviously stem from G-d's providence (as in Korach's case, when "G-d created a [unique] phenomenon"²⁵) {not only when their difficulties come because they are

“given over to circumstance”}. To refer to the Rambam’s statements:²⁶ “The fools who rebel... are dealt with in the same manner as other animals... For this reason, it is easy to kill them.”²⁷

According to this explanation, a question arises with regard to Moshe’s plea: “G-d, L-rd of spirits for all flesh: Will one person sin and You become enraged against the entire congregation?!” [Korach and his company were wicked. Thus] there was no particular Divine providence involving them (as is true with regard to inanimate matter, plants, and animals). Therefore it appears inappropriate for Moshe to ask G-d to invest Himself [in this matter] and differentiate between those who merely acted offensively and those who actually sinned.²⁸ On the contrary, it would appear appropriate that: “I will consume them this moment,” the same punishment being visited upon them all equally.

5.

In truth, however, the above does not present a difficulty. The matter can be resolved on the basis of the Mittlerer Rebbe’s explanation of the Rambam’s conception that G-d does not manifest His providence over inanimate matter, plants, and animals, in a particular manner (nor does He grant such providence to the wicked). [The Mittlerer Rebbe explains²⁹ that] this does not represent a contradiction to the Baal Shem Tov’s axiom³⁰ that all created beings are controlled by particular Divine providence, for there are in general two types of Divine providence:³¹

a) *Hashgachah P’nimis*: Divine providence which is overtly revealed and is not hidden by the garments of nature. This is the type of providence which the Rambam maintains is dependent on the manner in which a person clings to G-d. Such providence is not granted to inanimate matter, plants, and animals, or to the wicked (in an individual manner. Instead, his providence involves the species as a whole);

b) *Hashgachah Chitzonis*: Divine providence which is concealed and hidden within the garments of nature. Such providence exists with regard to every created being (as the Baal Shem Tov taught).

Thus even the Rambam would agree that Divine providence [controls the lives of] the wicked. It is just that this is expressed in a vague manner, i.e., en clothed in the garments of nature and thus it is not obvious which factors stem from G-d.

This explanation is not a contradiction to the concepts stated previously, that “evils and difficulties will be visited upon [the nation],” and “these evils [will] have found me,” interpreted by the Rambam to mean that they are “given over to circumstance.” This is also an expression of Divine providence,³² as it is written: “I will conceal My face.” The intent is that only the inner expression of His providence is hidden. Thus a person can convince himself that his difficulties “find him,” that they are part of the natural order or a function of circumstance.³³ In truth, however, every aspect [of his life] is being controlled by Divine providence.

6.

On this basis, we can appreciate the connection between the preface: “G-d, L-rd of spirits for all flesh” and [the core of] Moshe’s plea: “Will one person sin and You become enraged against the entire congregation?!”

As mentioned above (sec. 1), the words “L-rd of spirits for all flesh” includes even gentiles. Thus based on the passage from the Talmud Yerushalmi cited above, the Rogatchover Gaon interprets³⁴ the verse: “I am G-d, the L-rd of all flesh,” as teaching that “Divine providence also [controls the fate of] the gentiles.”

This was the basis of the plea of Moshe and Aharon that G-d invest Himself and clarify in a particular manner the difference between those who acted offensively and the sinner. True, they all were included in the categories of “the

fools” and “the wicked.” Nevertheless, since G-d “knows the thoughts” of even a gentile and Divine providence controls their fate as well (even when their minds do not cling to Him³⁵), He certainly “knows the thoughts” (and has His providence control the particular fate) of every Jew, even those who have overtly severed their bond with G-dliness.

7.

When a Jew does not fulfill G-d’s will, Divine providence controls his fate in an external manner, and thus is en clothed in the garments of nature, like the Divine providence which controls the fate of the gentiles. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between the manner of en clothment and the providence that controls the fate of Jews and *lehavdil*, gentiles.

The gentiles’ source of nurture and life-energy is the name Elokim (which is numerically equivalent to the word “*Hateva*,” nature). Thus their [destiny] is fundamentally controlled by the natural order. The providence which governs their fate stems initially from G-d’s name Elokim, i.e., from that level in G-dliness which is en clothed in the natural order.³⁶

The life-energy of the Jewish people, by contrast, [even those who do not carry out G-d’s will,] stems from G-d’s name Havayah itself.³⁷ This providence is p’nimiyus and can be overtly appreciated.

Although the providence which controls the fate of the Jews who do not carry out G-d’s will is concealed and is en clothed in nature, the intent is not that the providence from the name Havayah departs from them. [On the contrary,] in whatever situation a Jew is found, he is [part of] “the people to whom Havayah is close”³⁸ (as our Sages’ quote G-d as saying: “Regardless, they are My children”³⁹). [In this instance, however,] the providence which stems from the name Havayah is en clothed in the name Elokim.

This concept is also reflected in the phrase: “I shall conceal My face.” “My face,” i.e., the inner dimension of providence stemming from the name Havayah

[is present, but] is concealed. Therefore a person must meditate, thinking carefully, [until] he recognizes that Divine providence controls every dimension of all Jews' lives, even those who do not perform His will. [Through meditation,] this providence can be overtly recognized⁴⁰ (and the recognition causes [the unfolding of] His providence to become more apparent).

8.

On this basis, we can also comprehend [G-d's] purpose in “concealing [His] face,” and thus allowing a person to develop the misconception that the difficulties which he suffers are “visited upon him” and come on their own initiative, not from G-d.

On the surface, [such a motif is problematic]. The intent of G-d's conduct is to spur a Jew to teshuvah. How is it possible, however, for “conceal[ing] My face” to inspire a Jew to turn to G-d in teshuvah? At that time, (he does not feel that the suffering he undergoes comes through Divine providence). Instead, it appears that it is merely a matter of circumstance (without the intent of motivating him to teshuvah).

This question can be resolved as follows: [As mentioned,] the concealment of G-d's face is only on an external level, and from an inner perspective, G-d is involved in every single facet of the person's existence. Therefore, [the concealment] has the power to motivate a Jew to turn to G-d in teshuvah.

On the contrary, since the providence from the name Havayah involves (not a Jew's revealed powers, for on that level His providence is not obvious because of the concealment), but his essential being, his essence will be sparked.⁴¹

As is well known,⁴² the teshuvah which comes from the awesome distance from G-dliness affects the very essence of the soul, and therefore involves and brings about a change in every element of the person's Divine service. When, by contrast, a tzaddik turns to G-d in teshuvah , the effect on the totality of his

Divine service is less. This merely contributes a dimension of perfection to his Divine service.

9.

On this basis, we can appreciate G-d's answer to Moshe: "You have spoken well. I know and will make known who has sinned and who has not sinned." Moshe's plea was based on the principle that G-d knows the thoughts of all men, even gentiles, "all flesh," and therefore, Divine providence should control [the lives of] all Jews even those on the spiritual level of Korach's company. [Not only did G-d accept that basis, His reply was more encompassing, stating that not only does] He know, He will "make known who has sinned and who has not sinned," i.e., the Divine providence will be overtly revealed. All will actually see that G-d reveals providence which is p'nimiyus in nature in order to save those who have not sinned (although they did act offensively).

This type of providence relating to such people⁴³ and investing Himself in a revealed manner exists only with regard to the Jewish people, G-d's cherished nation.

-Based on the *sichos* delivered on *Shabbos Parshas Korach*, 5733 (1973)

ENDNOTES

1. *Bamidbar* 16:21.

2. *Ibid.*: 22.

3. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XIII, p. 54, which states that this is not a separate entry in *Rashi*, but a continuation of the previous entry.

4. This text is found in several printings of *Rashi*'s commentary. See *Likkutei Sichos*, *loc. cit.*, note 14.

5. *Sanhedrin* 7:8.

6. *Yirmeyahu* 32:27.

7. A similar question can be raised with regard to Moshe's request (*Parshas Pinchas*, *Bamidbar* 27:16): "May the L-rd of spirits for all flesh appoint a man over the congregation." "The congregation" refers to the Jewish people. Why is the term "for all flesh," which refers to gentiles, mentioned in this context. This is not the place for discussion of that matter.

8. *Bereishis* 18:23.

9. *Ibid.*: 25.
10. See *Likkutei Sichos*, *op. cit.*
11. *Rashi*, *Bamidbar* 16:19, with regard to the 250 men described as (*ibid.* 17:3): “those who sinned with their souls.” See *Likkutei Sichos*, *op. cit.*, note 22.
12. *Erwin* 13b, *et al.*
13. See the commentaries to *Avos* 3:15: “Everything is foreseen.”
14. This is the wording used by the Alter Rebbe in the *maamar* entitled *Eirda Na (Torah Or, Bereishis* , p. 14d). In several places (*Shabbos* 55a, *et al.*) our Sages quote G-d as using the expression: “It is revealed and known before Me.” Had the Alter Rebbe not included the conclusion of the phrase: “He who spoke and the world came into being,” he would have also included those statements of our Sages. Nevertheless, by using this phrase, he alludes to another example and proof that comes from their choice of wording “who spoke and the world came into being” (instead of “who brought the world into being.” The difference between these two expressions parallels the difference between the phrase (*Tehillim* 148:5): “He commanded and they were created,” and the phrase (*Bereishis* 1:1): “G-d created.” See *Torah Or, Megillas Esther*, p. 96c.)
Moreover, this choice of wording indicates that even on the level where the worlds are brought into being, G-d knows in a manner of “it is revealed and known.”
15. As *Rashi* does in fact in *Parshas Pinchas* (*op. cit.* , in interpretation of the phrase “L-rd of spirits”): “It is revealed and known before You.”
16. See *Torah Or, loc. cit.*; *Derech Mitzvosecha, mitzvas eglah arufah*, sec. II, and in the accompanying note; the *maamar* entitled *ViHinei Nisba'er Le'eil*, 5663.
17. [The deeds of the created beings do have an effect, by contrast, on the Divine potential that invests itself actively in the world.] Thus our Sages (*Eichah Rabbah* 1:6) state that when the Jews do not carry out G-d's will, they diminish His great power. See the discussion of this subject in the *Shaloh* , *Shaar HaGadol* (p. 29b ff.).
18. See the note accompanying ch. 24 of *Tanya*.
19. Vol. III, chs. 17-18. See the sources discussed in the brief entitled *Hashgachah Peratis* published in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. VIII, p. 278ff., and the Rebbe's *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. I, p. 168.
20. See *Moreh Nevuchim*, Vol. III, ch. 51.
21. *Tehillim* 49:13.
22. *Devarim* 31:17.
23. *Moreh Nevuchim, loc. cit.*
24. [Trans. Note: According to this perspective, there are certain harmful forces within the natural order. A righteous man who clings to G-d is protected from these harmful forces. When a person does not cling to Him, by contrast, he is not protected and these harmful forces can “find” him. Thus as the Rebbe continues to explain, difficulties appear to arise on their own initiative and not as retribution for one's sins as ordained by G-d.]
25. *Bamidbar* 16:30. [I.e., the earth swallowed up Korach. This is obviously not a natural event, but a G-dly act. Nevertheless, as will be explained, this does not necessarily mean that His providence will make particular distinctions with regard to the individuals involved.]
26. *Moreh Nevuchim, loc. cit.*, ch. 18.
27. To cite a [somewhat parallel] concept: (By and large,) there is no distinction with regard to the punishments [meted out by the court] to gentiles [for the violation of the seven commandments they are obligated to observe]. In all cases, [a violation] is punishable by death. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XVIII, p. 168.
28. Needless to say, all explanations will agree that G-d knows all the particulars involved [and is aware of the distinctions], as stated in *Ikkarim, maamar* 4, ch. 7 (cited in the brief printed in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. VIII, p. 279). Nevertheless, reward and punishment stem from G-d's providence, and may not relate to this level of knowledge. See the passage in *Ikkarim* cited above.
29. *Derech Chayim, Shaar HaTeshuvah*, ch. 9 (p. 13a,b). See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XIX, p. 181.
30. See the *Hosafos to Kesser Shem Tov*, sec. 19ff., which state that even a leaf fluttering in the wind is controlled by a specific Divine will and desire.
31. See the *maamar* entitled *Asher Ye'amar, Or HaTorah, Parshas Vayeira*, p. 103aff.) and the *maamar* entitled *Tzohar Taaseh*, 5673. [See also *Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. I, p. 166.] See also Rabbeinu Bachaye who states {in his commentary to *Vayikra* 18:19 (the portion beginning: “This is the opinion of the *Ramban* regarding this verse) quoted in *Kehilas Yaakov, erech Hashgachah Peratis* } that the manner in which Divine providence affects man is twofold:
a) to watch over his deeds; this applies to every man whether Jew or non-Jew; and

b) to protect him from [undesirable] circumstances; this applies only to the righteous.

32. See the conclusion of the *Shomer Emunim* (quoted in the brief published in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. VIII, p. 278ff.) which states: There is nothing which happens that occurs by chance, without a Divine intent and providence. This is intimated by *Vayikra* 26:24: “And I, too, will conduct Myself with you with casualness (hre)” which implies that even vren, chance circumstance, has its source in Him, for everything stems from Him and [is controlled by] His providence.

See also the brief cited above, p. 279 (with regard to inanimate matter, plants, and animals). And see the *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Taaniyos* 1:3 which states: “When I bring a difficulty.... “I will add fury to this circumstance.”

This follows the interpretation that Divine providence does not control inanimate objects, plants, and animals, but rather “the personal fate of the individuals is determined by circumstance and not by Divine decree” (*Shomer Emunim, loc. cit.*). Nevertheless, “even chance circumstance has its source in Him.” According to the Baal Shem Tov, the interpretation is that G-d decrees that every particular blade of grass will live (the *maamar* entitled *Al Kein Yomru*, 5696, *Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, Vol. II, p. 740; see even more inclusive statements in the *Hosafos to Kesser Shem Tov*, sec. 121, and the accompanying note). [G-d’s decree] is, however, en clothed in the garments of nature. (Similar concepts apply with regard to “I will conceal My face” and “evil will be visited upon [the nation].”)

[Trans. Note: In the text of the *sichah*, the Rebbe explains that the fundamental principle that Divine providence controls everything that happens to any and every creation in the world is accepted by all Torah authorities. The difference between the interpretations concerns only the extent to which that providence is manifest. For the righteous, His providence is manifest and it is overtly obvious how He controls every element of their lives. For others, the way He controls their fate is dependent on the natural order and it may seem that their lives are controlled by nature. That is, however, only the outward truth. For even when nature controls a creation’s fate, nature is dependent on G-d.

More particularly, however, there is a difference of opinion between the approach of the *Rambam* (and the others who follow the approach of *Chakirah*, Jewish metaphysics) and the Baal Shem Tov. According to the *Rambam*, G-d’s involvement in the particulars of the future of any being other than the righteous is “passive.” He has created the natural order, and He has deemed that the natural order control the fate of these entities. In contrast, according to the Baal Shem Tov, every element of existence and every slight change that occurs regarding it depends on G-d’s will and desire.]

33. See *Rambam, Hilchos Taaniyos, loc. cit.*

34. In his gloss to the Torah, the *Haftorah of Parshas Behar*.

35. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XVIII, p. 169, note 50, and the marginal comments to that note.

36. See the discussion of this subject in *Sefer HaArachim Chabad, erech Umos HaOlam*, p. 301ff., *et al.*

37. See [the sources cited above:] the *maamar* entitled *ViHinei Nisba’er Le’eil*, 5663; *Derech Chayim*; and the *maamar* entitled *Tzohar Taaseh*, 5673.

38. The *maamar* entitled *ViHinei Nisba’er Le’eil*, 5663; see also the *maamar* entitled *Tzohar Taaseh*, 5673; *Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. I, p. 84a; *HaYom Yom*, p. 108. The passage from *Derech Chayim* cited above states that Divine providence is *p’nimiyus* when the Jews carry out G-d’s will. Similarly, the *maamar* entitled *Tzohar Taaseh*, 5673, states: “Even as the souls descend to this physical plane they are close to *Havayah* through the Torah and its *mitzvos* Through [these mediums] they are the nation close to Him.” [Thus it appears that the Jews’ closeness to G-d and the manifestation of His providence in a *p’nimiyus* manner is dependent on their observance.] Nevertheless, it appears to me, that this applies only with regard to the revelation of His providence within the conscious powers of the soul.

39. See *Kiddushin* 36a; *Sifri, Haazinu*, 32:5 (there it appears that even R. Yehudah accepts R. Meir’s conception); *Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:15; *et al.*

40. See the *maamar* entitled *Tzohar Taaseh, loc. cit.*, which states: “Only the souls of the Jewish people know and comprehend... that everything stems from G-d’s influence.... When [a person] focuses his heart and attention on this, he can recognize Divine providence in the world with actual sight.”

41. [Trans. Note: When a soul has not distanced itself from G-d, G-d relates to that soul according to its cognitive powers. When, however, a person’s cognitive powers have been turned away from G-d, G-d does not relate to him on that framework and instead, arouses his very essence.]

42. See *Shaarei Teshuvah*, Vol. II; *Chinuch*, ch. 48, *et al.*

43. [I.e., sinners].