

## Aharon HaKohen went up to Har HaHar at the word of Hashem and died there. (33:38)

As believing Jews, we adhere to the concept of *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence, which means: The world's continued existence is directly/solely dependent upon the *ratzon Hashem*, will of G-d. Once a man creates an entity, the creation becomes a separate entity, apart from its creator. Veritably, he created it, but now, it exists in its own right. Furthermore, each individual creation often gains control over its creator. While human beings have within them the power and capability to be creative, to unleash forces or to combine them, they are unable to control their creations or bridle the forces they have unleashed. Once the "genie" is out of the bottle, it is out of their hands. Not so Hashem and His world. The world as a whole and all its parts – including all of the creatures within it – are His creations. Not only did they come into existence through His will, but they are maintained and continue to exist solely as a result of His will. Hashem is very much a part of each of our lives.

*Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, cites the story of Yosef and his brothers as a paradigm of *Hashgachah Pratis*. Indeed, Yosef points out to his brothers how the entire chain of events clearly was a manifestation of Divine Providence. Hardly another story so cogently and vividly demonstrates the ways of Divine Providence. In this story, the threads are clearly revealed. Even one who is plagued with spiritual myopia can lucidly see the workings of Hashem.

I write this brief introduction as a segue to show how *Hashgachah Pratis* plays out. In *Parashas Beha'alo-secha* (*Bamidbar* 9:6), the Torah relates that there were men who were *tamei*, ritually contaminated, and, as a result of their defilement, were unable to share in offering the *Korban Pesach* together with the rest of the nation. *Chazal* debate as to the identity of these men. Rabbi Akiva contends that they were Mishael and Elitzafan, Aharon *HaKohen's* nephews, who were charged with removing the bodies of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon *HaKohen's* sons, who perished during the dedication of the *Mishkan*. Mishael and Elitzafan attended to the bodies, removing them from *Machne Shechinah*. An obvious question presents itself: Nadav and Avihu died on *Rosh Chodesh*. Certainly, Mishael and Elitzafan had sufficient time to return from the burial and wait the necessary period (one week) to achieve purity, and then participate in the *Korban Pesach*.

The *Ben Yehoyada* (*Succah* 25b) explains that Nadav and Avihu were not buried where they died; rather, their bodies were taken to *Har HaHar*, the place where their father, Aharon, was to be buried. *Tzaddikim* derive much *nachas ruach*, spiritual pleasure, from being buried near their descendants. Accordingly, Mishael and Elitzafan did not have sufficient time to return from the burial and participate in the *Korban Pesach* in a timely fashion.

This is incredible! Aharon *HaKohen* was buried on *Har HaHar* thirty-eight years after his sons' untimely deaths. Thirty-eight years prior to his demise, Aharon *HaKohen's* gravesite was already determined. We believe that life and death are providential. We see now that Hashem determines

even where and near whom one is buried, which presages one's death.

The *Megaleh Amukos*, *Horav Nosson Nota Shapira, zl*, was a holy *tzaddik* who was as comfortable in the Heavenly spheres as he was in this world. *Eliyahu HaNavi* studied with him. His lifetime was a glorious era for *Klal Yisrael*. The *Bach* and *Turei Zahav* were the leaders of *Klal Yisrael* at the time. Indeed, with such an unprecedented spiritual "lineup," Heaven decided that the time for the Redemption had arrived. *Satan* asked for a "reprieve," one more chance to cause the Jewish People to slide. He was given one last chance. He appeared to the *Bach*, claiming to be a Heavenly Angel who wanted to learn with him. The *Bach's* father appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to stay away. The *Megaleh Amukos* saw right through him. *Satan* tried the other Torah giants, to no avail. Finally, he found one scholar sufficiently gullible to become his victim: *Shabtai Tzvi*, who succeeded in leading thousands of Jews astray with his devastating cult.

The *Megaleh Amukos* died in 1623. Following his *petirah*, passing, a young man whom no one knew appeared in Cracow and immediately presented himself to the head of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Sacred Burial Society. His request was stranger than his appearance. He wanted to purchase the burial plot next to that of the *Megaleh Amukos*. The *gabbai* thought this man was unhinged. Not just anyone could be buried next to such a saint. "He was the greatest of the greats! "How dare you ask to be buried next to him?" was the *gabbai's* rejoinder to the strange man. With that, he drove the young man away. The young man refused to accept "no" for an answer. He returned a few days later and buttressed his request with cash. He pleaded to have the burial plot sold to him. Money was no object.

The *gabbai* conjectured that the spot was presently available. The young man would certainly live to a ripe, old age, while he, the *gabbai*, was getting on in years. In addition, the *Chevra Kaddisha* had fallen on difficult financial straits. An infusion of funds would make a difference. So, greed transcended merit, and he sold him the plot, after wishing him good health and a long life. How shocked the *gabbai* was to learn the very next day that the young man had died during the night. Since no one knew about the sale, except the *gabbai* and the deceased, the *gabbai* arranged for the deceased to be buried in an ordinary grave.

That night the *gabbai's* sleep was disturbed by the deceased, who appeared to him demanding his rightful plot. Although shaken up, the *gabbai* ignored the dream. After a few nights of interrupted sleep, however, he no longer could ignore the fact that he had acted unjustly and was being called to task. The next day, he presented his problem to the *Rav* of Cracow, the *Bach*, who responded that he tell the deceased that *halachah* is decided in this world. If he has a dispute, he must appear before the *bais din* on a certain day, at a specific time.

On the agreed upon day, a partition was set up in the *bais din*, so that no one would see the deceased. They heard a rustling sound behind the partition, which was a sign that he had "arrived." The *Bach* commanded the deceased to present his case – which he did. The *Bach* then turned to the *gabbai* to explain his actions, which he apologetically did. The deceased was asked to

reveal his identity, so that his worthiness for being buried next to the *Megaleh Amukos* could be determined. He refused to divulge his name.

The *Bach* rendered his decision: "The sale should be valid. However, since we do not know the identity of the deceased, and in which case he might not be on a spiritual plane that would allow him to be a suitable 'neighbor' to our late *Rav*, we will allow for the deceased to 'prove' his suitability. The grave next to the *Rav* will be opened, as will be the present grave of the deceased. If the deceased is worthy of being the *Rav's* neighbor, he should 'arrange' for his body to be moved over. If not, we are free of our obligations."

The *Chevra Kaddisha* opened both graves. The next day, they were shaken to discover that the grave of the deceased was empty, and the grave next to the *Megaleh Amukos* was now filled. Understanding that the deceased was a holy, covert *tzaddik*, they engraved the following on his *matzeivah*, tombstone: "Here lies the unknown *avreich* (young man) – *ya'id alav rei'o* (his neighbor, the *Megaleh Amukos*, attests to his greatness).