



VA'ETCHANAN

THE WORLD DOESN'T EXIST

Why Nothing Can Get in the Way of Good

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Pinchas

Moses tells the people of Israel how he implored G-d to allow him to enter the Land of Israel, but G-d refuses, instructing him instead to ascend a mountain and see the Promised Land.

Continuing his “review of the Torah,” Moses describes the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah, declaring them unprecedented events in human history. “Has there ever occurred this great thing, or has the likes of it ever been heard? Did ever a people hear the voice of G d speaking out of the midst of the fire . . . and live? . . . You

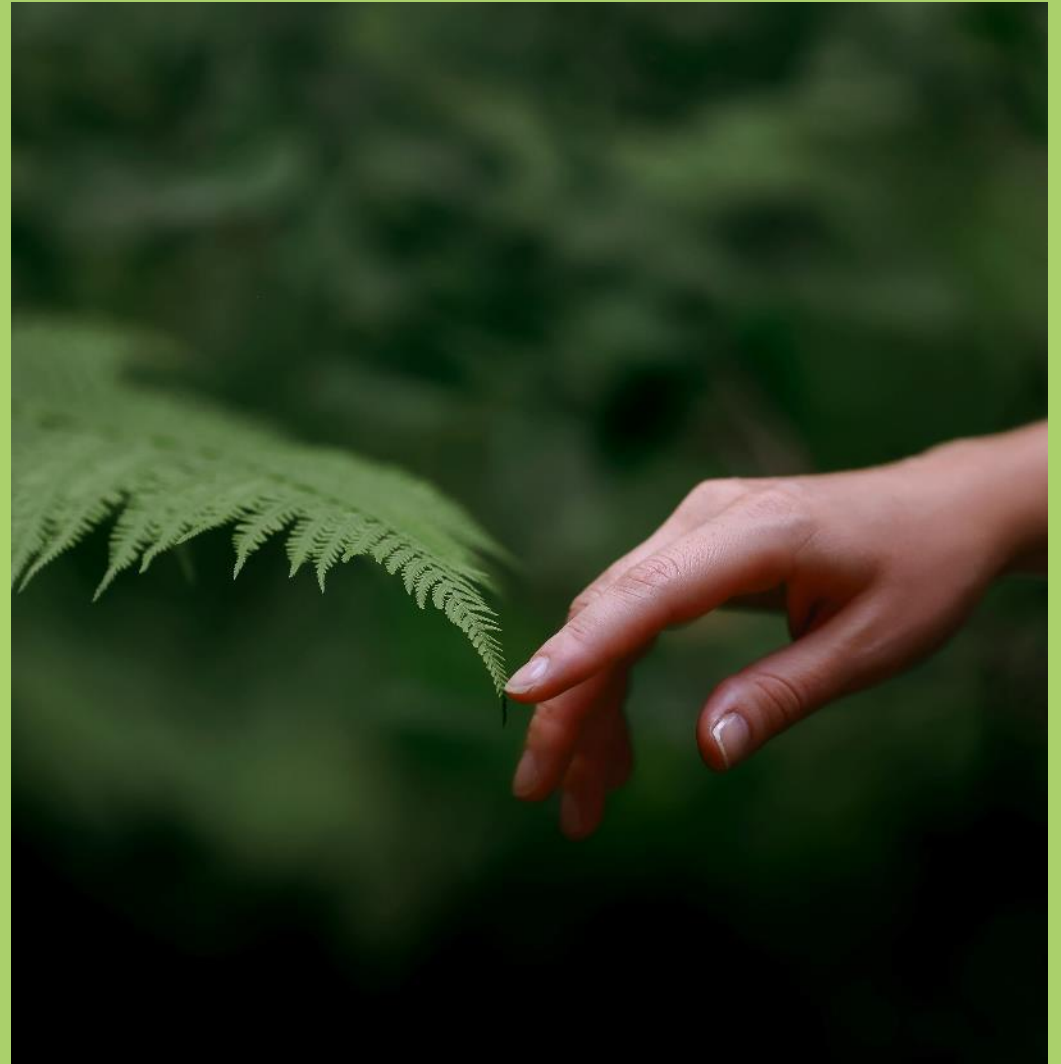
were shown to know that the L-rd is G-d; . . . there is none else besides Him.”

Moses predicts that in future generations, the people will turn away from G-d, worship idols, and be exiled from their land and scattered among the nations; but from there, they will seek G-d and return to obey His commandments.

Our *parshah* also includes a repetition of the Ten Commandments and the verses of the Shema, which declare the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: the unity of G-d (“Hear O Israel: the L-rd

our G-d, the L-rd is One”); the *mitzvot* to love G d, to study His Torah, to bind “these words” as *tefilin* on our arms and heads, and to inscribe them in the *mezuzot* affixed on the doorposts of our homes.

Do we believe in a personal G-d Who is intimately engaged with the conduct of our affairs, or do we believe that G-d does not intervene in the world He created?



TEXT 1

Deuteronomy 4:32–35

לב. כִּי שֶׁאֵל נָא לְיָמִים רִאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ
לְפָנֶיךָ, לְמִן הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם
עַל הָאָרֶץ, וְלִמְקַצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד קִצֵּה
הַשָּׁמַיִם, הֲנִהְיָה כַדְבָר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה אוֹ
הַנִּשְׁמַע כַּמֵּהוּ?

לג. הֲשָׁמַע עָם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים מְדַבֵּר מִתּוֹךְ
הָאֵשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ אֶתְּהָ וַיַּחֲיֶיךָ?

לד. אוֹ הֲנִסָּה אֱלֹהִים לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לוֹ גוֹי
מִקְרֵב גוֹי, בְּמִסַּת בְּאִתַּת וּבְמוֹפְתִים
וּבְמִלְחָמָה, וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרוּעַ נְטוּיָה
וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדוֹלִים, כָּלֵל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְכֶם
ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ?

לה. אֶתְּהָ הֲרִאֵתָ לְדַעַת כִּי ה' הוּא
הָאֱלֹהִים, אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבָדוֹ.

32. Inquire, please, about the early ages that came before you, from the day G-d created humankind on Earth—has anything this grand ever occurred or been heard from one end of Heaven to the other?

33. Has a nation ever heard the voice of G-d speak to them through fire and survived as you have?

34. Or has a G-d ever performed miracles to come and extract one nation from the midst of another with trials, signs, wonders, war, a strong hand, an outstretched arm, and great awesome events—everything G-d did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

35. You were shown so that you would know that G-d is the G-d; there is none besides Him.

What do the passages describe?

1. No specific event
2. When the Jews heard G-d's voice at Mount Sinai
3. The miracles witnessed during the Exodus



QUESTION

The final passage describes an ambiguous event, a point when the Jews saw G-d, and there was none besides Him. When did this occur—during the Exodus or at Mount Sinai?

TEXT 2A

*Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno,
ad loc.*

את כל אלה הראך הקל יתברך, כדי שתתבונן
ותדע בלי ספק כי ה' הוא האלקים.

The blessed G-d showed you all these [miracles]
for you to contemplate and know beyond a
shadow of a doubt that G-d is the G-d.

TEXT 2B

Rashi, ad loc.

כְּשֶׁנָּתַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, פָּתַח לָהֶם
שִׁבְעָה רְקִיעִים. וְכִשֶּׁם שֶׁקָּרַע אֶת הָעֲלִיוֹנִים, כֵּן
קָרַע אֶת הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים, וְרָאוּ שֶׁהוּא יְחִידִי.

When G-d gave the Torah, He opened all seven Heavens for them. And as He tore open the Heavenly spheres, so did He tear open the earthly realm, and they saw that He is alone.

ANSWER

RABBI SEFORNO



The final passage describes the Exodus

RASHI



The final passage describes Mount Sinai

QUESTION

What did the Jews see at Mount Sinai to demonstrate that G-d is the only G-d?

TEXT 3

*Rabbi Yanki Tauber,
“The Doctrine of
Perpetual Creation,”
www.chabad.org*

A basic principle of Judaism is that the entirety of existence was created by G-d *yesh me-ayin*, “something from nothing.” Everything—matter and energy, space and time, even the very phenomenon of existence—was generated from a prior state of utter nothingness by the Creator. . . .

Creation is not a one-time act after which the world exists on its own, like a carpenter who builds a cabinet and walks away from it. Rather, G d continually creates the world, constantly forcing it out of an initial state of utter nothingness into existence and life. Should this flow of vitality cease for even an instant, G d forbid, all would revert to absolute nothingness.

G-d is continuously
creating the world.
Should He stop for an
instant, everything
would cease to exist.



TEXT 4A

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Shaar
Hayichud Veha'emunah,
ch. 3*

וְהַמְּשָׁל לְזֶה הוּא אֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ "הַמְּאִיר
לְאֶרֶץ וְלְדָרִים", שֶׁהוּא זִיו וְאֹר
הַמְתַּפְּשֵׁט מִגּוֹף הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְנִרְאֶה לְעֵין כָּל,
מְאִיר עַל הָאֶרֶץ וּבְחִלּוֹל הָעוֹלָם.

וְהִנֵּה, זֶה פְּשׁוּט שֶׁאֹר וְזִיו הַזֶּה יִשְׁנֶוּ
גַם כֵּן בְּגוֹף וְחוּמֵר כְּדוֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עֲצָמוֹ
שֶׁבְּשָׂמִים, שֶׁאֵם מְתַפְּשֵׁט וּמְאִיר
לְמִרְחֹק כָּל כָּף, כָּל שֶׁכֵּן שְׂיֻכָּל לְהֵאִיר
בְּמִקוֹמוֹ מִמֶּשׁ. רַק שֶׁשָּׁם, בְּמִקוֹמוֹ
מִמֶּשׁ, נִחְשָׁב הַזִּיו הַזֶּה לְאֵין וְאֶפְס
מִמֶּשׁ, כִּי בְּטֵל מִמֶּשׁ בְּמִצִּיאוֹת לְגַבֵּי גוֹף
כְּדוֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, שֶׁהוּא מְקוֹר הָאֹר וְהַזִּיו
הַזֶּה, שֶׁהַזִּיו וְהָאֹר הַזֶּה אֵינֶוּ רַק הָאֶרֶה
מְאִירָה מִגּוֹף וְעֲצָם כְּדוֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ.

The light of the sun that radiates upon the Earth and its inhabitants will serve as an analogy. We refer to the ray of light that extends from the sun in a manner that is visible to all, and illuminates the Earth and the expanse of the universe.

It is obvious that the ray is also present in the body of the sun's globe in the sky. If it can extend and illuminate at such great distances, it can certainly shed light in its own place. However, there, in its own place, the ray is considered to be absolute nothingness because it is completely subsumed within the sun, its source. The light ray we see is merely a glimmer that radiates from the sun.

TEXT 4A

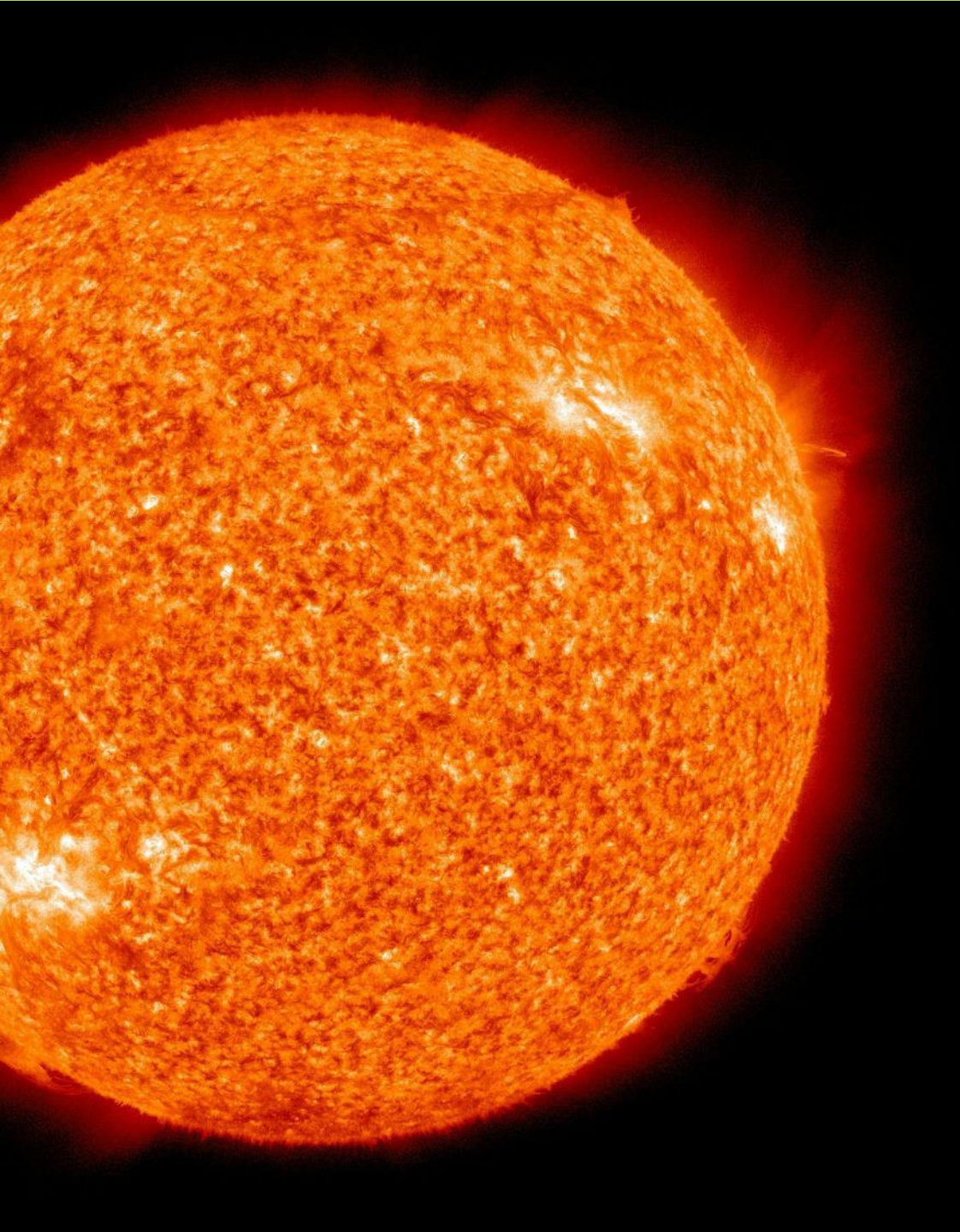
*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Shaar
Hayichud Veba'emunah,
ch. 3*

רק בחלל העולם, תחת כל השמים ועל
הארץ, שאין כאן גוף כדור השמש
במציאות — נראה כאן האור והזיו
הזה ליש ממש לעין כל, ונופל עליו
כאן שם "יש" באמת.

מה שאין כן כשהוא במקורו בגוף
השמש — אין נופל עליו שם "יש"
כלל, רק שם "אין" ו"אפס", כי באמת
הוא שם לאין ואפס ממש, שאין מאיר
שם רק מקורו לבדו, שהוא גוף השמש
המאיר ואפס בלעדו.

However, within the expanse of the universe,
under the heavens and upon the Earth, where
the body of the sun's globe is not present, the
light ray appears to the beholder to have an
actual existence; that is where the term
existence can be applied to it.

However, so long as the ray remains within its
source, the sun, the term existence cannot be
applied to it. It can only be called naught,
nothingness. The ray is literally nothing within
the sun. There, only its source, the sun's
luminous body, gives light. Nothing else exists.



Everything that exists,
exists only as a part of
G-d, like a ray of light
exists within the sun.

QUESTION

If G-d is our very existence, why are we completely oblivious to this fact?

ANSWER

G-d goes to great lengths to conceal our nothingness from us. Therefore, we perceive ourselves as existing independently from G-d.

TEXT 4B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Shaar
Hayichud Veha'emunah,
ch. 3*

זֶהוּ מִחֲמַת שְׂאִין אָנוּ מְשִׁיגִים וְרוֹאִים
בְּעֵינַי בְּשָׂר אֵת פֶּח ה' וְרוּחַ פִּיּו שְׂפִנְבָּרָא.

אָבֵל אֵילוּ גִיתָנָה רְשׁוֹת לְעֵין לְרֵאוֹת
וְלִהְשִׁיג אֵת הַחַיּוֹת וְרוּחָנִיּוֹת שְׂפָכְל גְּבָרָא
הַשׁוֹפֵעַ בּוּ מְמוֹצָא פִי ה' וְרוּחַ פִּיּו, לֹא
הָיָה גִשְׁמִיּוֹת הַגְּבָרָא וְחִוּמָרוֹ וּמְמָשׁוּ
גְּרָאָה כָּלֵל לְעֵינֵינוּ. כִּי הוּא בְּטֵל
בְּמַצִּיאוֹת מְמָשׁ לְגִבֵי הַחַיּוֹת וְהַרוּחָנִיּוֹת
שָׁבוּ, מֵאַחַר שְׂמִבְלַעְדֵי הַרוּחָנִיּוֹת, הָיָה
אֵין נְאֻפָס מְמָשׁ, כְּמוֹ קוּדֵם שִׁשֶׁת יָמֵי
בְּרֵאשִׁית מְמָשׁ . . .

אִם כֵּן, אָפָס בְּלַעְדוֹ בְּאַמַּת.

This is because the physical eye cannot understand and see the power of G-d and the breath of His mouth in the created being.

Had the eye been permitted to see and understand the spiritual life force that flows from G-d's mouth and breath in the created being, the universe's tangible materialism and physicality would not be visible to the eye. It would be utterly null compared to the spiritual life force within it, considering that without the life force, the created being would be utter nothingness—literally as it was before Creation. . . .

Therefore, there is truly none besides G-d.

TEXT 4C

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, ibid.*

נְשַׁבְּמִשְׁל, אֵין הַמְּקוֹר בְּמַצִּיאוֹת כָּלל בְּחִלּל הָעוֹלָם וְעַל הָאָרֶץ שֶׁנִּרְאָה שָׁם
אוֹרוֹ לִישׁ גְּמוּר.

מֵה שֶׁאֵין כֵּן כָּל הַבְּרוּאִים, הֵם בְּמְקוֹרָם תָּמִיד. רַק שֶׁאֵין הַמְּקוֹר נִרְאָה
לְעֵינַי בְּשָׂר.

In the analogy, the sun is not present in the expanse of the universe and on the Earth. [Therefore] the ray can be seen to exist.

This is not the case for [G-d's] creations. They are perpetually within their Source. It is just that the Source is not visible to the human eye.

ANSWER

When G-d opened the Heavens over Mount Sinai, His infinity was revealed, and the Jewish nation saw that everything exists as a part of G-d.

TEXT 5

*Rashi, Deuteronomy
4:35*

כְּשֶׁנָּתַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, פָּתַח לָהֶם שִׁבְעָה
רְקִיעִים. וְכִשֶּׁם שֶׁקָּרַע אֶת הָעֲלִיוֹנִים כִּךָּ קָרַע אֶת הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים,
וַרְאוּ שֶׁהוּא יְחִידִי.

When G-d gave the Torah, He opened all seven Heavens for them. And as He tore open the Heavenly spheres, so did He tear open the earthly realm, and they saw that He is alone.

OPEN



The universe is clearly a part of G-d

TEAR OPEN



The universe needs to be forced to reveal its truth

TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 24, p. 40*

ס'איז אבער פאראן לפעמים ווען "מנסה ה' אלקיכם אתכם גו'", אז עס קומט אן ענין של נסיון, וואס ענינו איז מסתיר זיין און מעלים זיין אויף אלקות, און דער חיות אלקי שבנסיון איז נפל למטה ביותר, ביז ער איז בהעלם והסתר לגמרי.

און כדי דער ניצוץ אלקי זאל נתגלה ווערן, איז ניט גענוג די עבודה פון "פתח", נאר עס דארף זיין "קרע", צערייסן און מבטל זיין דעם העלם והסתר.

There are occasions when G-d tests us by concealing the truth of the Divine's presence [in the world]: when G-d's word that creates the dynamics that stand in our way is completely invisible and hidden behind a mask.

At such times, it is not sufficient to "open" the mask. At that point, we need to "tear it open." We must destroy and nullify the mask entirely.

Tear up the arguments
that hide the fact that
you and your desires are
part of G-d in order to
unveil the truth of G-d's
presence in the world.



TEXT 7A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, ibid.*

דער אופן העבודה בעצמו אין עבודת הנסיונות איז — "קרע": ער טוט היפך טבעו ורגילותו, עבודה במסירות נפש שלמעלה ממדידה והגבלה.

וואס אין דער עבודה באופן כזה איז — "כשם שקרע את העליונים כך קרע את התחתונים", פונקט ווי ער רעכענט זיך ניט און איז מבטל די העלמות והגבלות ומסכים פון זיינע כחות העליונים, תענוג, רצון, שכל ומדות, אזוי איז ער אויך מבטל די מסכים פון די כחות התחתונים שבו, די הגבלות הגוף ונפש הבהמית.

Our internal response to being tried and tested is to make a [large internal] tear. Go against what feels natural, don't resort to what is familiar, and plow forward with utter determination and without restraint.

This determined thrust should tear through your higher aspirations and your lower urges. First, you disregard and plow through the concealments, limitations, and veils of your higher faculties—your delights, desires, understandings, and feelings. Then, you disregard the veils of your lower faculties—the limitations of your body and animal soul.



All the obstacles that seem to sap our will and determination only appear to have that power.

In reality, they can't stand against G-d or keep us from fulfilling G-d's will.

TEXT 7B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, ibid., p. 45*

קען קיין זאך ניט אפהאלטן א אידן פון מקיים זיין רצון ה' און פירן זיך בכל ענינו לויט הוראות ה' בתורתו.

ווייל ס'איז ניטא קיין אנדער מציאות אמיתית בעולם וואס זאל מעלים זיין, חס ושלום, און ניט צולאזן מקיים זיין רצונו.

Nothing can keep Jews from fulfilling the will of G-d and from conducting all their affairs according to G-d's instructions in His Torah.

Because nothing exists outside of G-d, nothing has the power to, G-d forbid, conceal the truth and prevent us from fulfilling G-d's will.

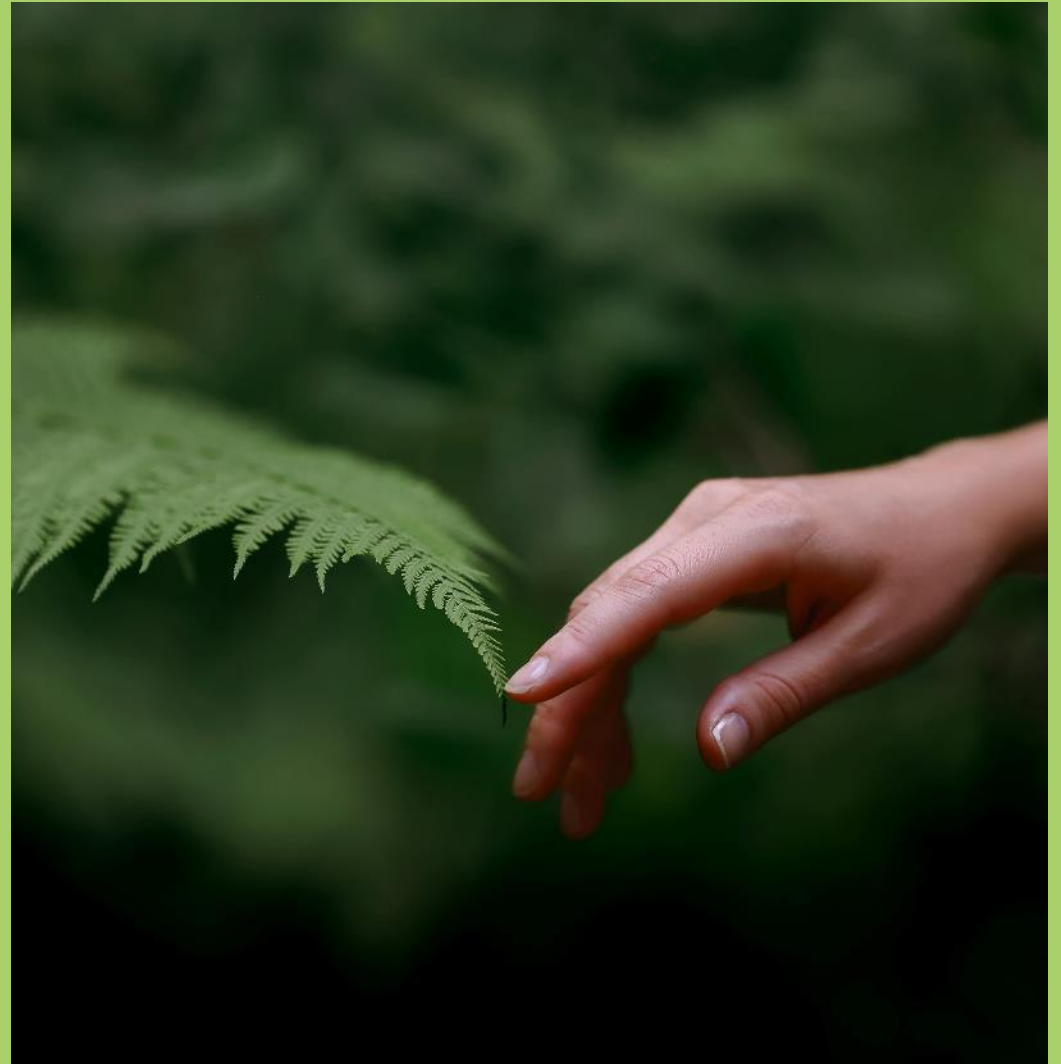
TEXT 8

*Rabbi Yanki Tauber,
“The Doctrine of
Perpetual Creation,”
www.chabad.org*

Often, as we journey through life and grapple with its myriad challenges, we experience moments of hopelessness and despair. At these times, we seem incapable of seeing any good in ourselves or in a fellow human being, nor of discerning any redeeming purpose in the dilemma or circumstance in which we find ourselves.

But the doctrine of perpetual creation means that at every point in time, the world is the way it is only because G d actively desires to so create it. There can be no “hopeless” situations, no “meaningless” moments, for this very moment, with all its attendant circumstances, was only just now brought into being out of absolute nothingness by a purposeful Creator who is the ultimate source of good.

G-d is one with everything in this world. When we recognize that truth in the face of obstacles, nothing can stand in our way.



KEY POINTS

1. The world gives off the appearance of existing independently from its Creator. As such, life sometimes seems able to prevent us from following G-d's wishes as communicated in the Torah.
2. The truth is, nothing exists independently from G-d. G-d creates us continually, and if He were to stop for even a moment, we would cease to exist.
3. Moreover, when we are within G-d, nothing exists except for G-d. Since G-d is omnipresent, we are always within G-d. Thus, we, and the universe, have no existence outside of G-d.
4. G-d concealed this truth, which creates the illusion of self-existence. This is why it seems at times like the world is standing in our way when we want to practice in a Jewish manner.

KEY POINTS

5. Knowing the truth empowers us to know that self-existence is an illusion. If an obstacle to Jewish practice appears in our path and we bear down with determination, it will disappear.

