



# Does G-d Really Care?

*Many young people believe in a higher power. But does that power care about how they live? What does Judaism have to say on the topic?*

## The Positive Trend

Recently, the Wall Street Journal published the results of a survey regarding what percentage of young people believe in a higher power. It turns out that one-third of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 believe in a “higher power,” in contrast to a survey conducted a few years ago, which indicated the same only about a quarter of young people.

Many of them say that they don’t like organized religion and they don’t participate in formal religious institutions, but deep down, they have faith. The article quotes various experts and psychologists who try to explain what caused this change; why are young people suddenly discovering a faith in a higher power? They argue that in recent years, especially with the global pandemic, people have lost a sense of personal security, and have therefore turned to a higher power. Perhaps there is some truth to this, but regardless, we are seeing a trend shift among young people, and this is good news.

## The Essential Questions

In general, human beings naturally believe there is a creator of the world (unless they are brainwashed and convinced otherwise). It is part of our DNA; we naturally have a strong sense that the world is not a jungle, and there is a certain entity responsible for and governing the world.

But here comes the question: Many people believe in a Creator of the world, but does this Creator really care about what we do? Does it truly matter to the Creator what I eat? Does it make a difference to the Creator if I put on tefillin or light Shabbat candles?

A person can truly believe in the existence of a higher power, yet still grapple with this question. It's not a question of faith; it's clear to him that the higher power exists. The question is whether this higher power has any concern for his creations. Does it truly matter to the higher power what happens to animals and creatures? G-d has a vast universe to manage, and we are just a miniscule part!

There is also another question that bothers many people: The Book of Ecclesiastes says, "G-d is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). The higher power is in the highest spiritual realms, while we, as small human beings, are here on earth. Therefore, the question arises: Is it really possible to communicate with Him?

It is true that humans are capable of doing great things. We swim faster than any fish, soar higher than any eagle, and dig faster than any mole. Human music is more beautiful than bird songs. But still, our accomplishments seem inconsequential in comparison to the greatness of the Creator. So the question remains relevant: Is there a connection between humans and the higher power?

The question is a fundamental one. The higher power is infinite, while humans are finite, and it seems impossible to establish a relationship between something finite and something infinite. If you have ten dollars and your friend has a hundred dollars, then the moment you gain an additional dollar, you get closer to your friend who has a hundred. However, if you have a million dollars and your friend has limitless dollars, no matter how many dollars you accumulate, you will never get closer to him.

G-d is infinite, while we are limited beings. So how is it realistic for us to establish a connection and communication with Him?

## **The Story of the Ten Commandments**

The event of the giving of the Torah resolves both of these questions. It is the moment when G-d descended to Mount Sinai and made contact with humanity, instructing them on how to conduct themselves. Clearly, the higher power communicates with us and cares about what we do.

From the perspective of humanity as a whole, this event was more important than the Exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the Red Sea. Those were personal miracles for the Jewish people, while the giving of the Torah signified a connection between the Creator and all humanity.

By way of example:

In New Mexico, there are miles and miles of highly sensitive antennas. These antennas are directed towards space and are meant to listen to all transmissions from space. Let's say that one day they receive a transmission from a distant star, a message that someone transmitted to someone else about a laundry list. The moment we will hear something like that, our entire worldview will change. Suddenly, it will become clear that there is life on that distant planet. What is exactly said in the message may not matter as much; the fact that they heard something at all is what's important.

This exact point is expressed in a Midrash, which states that until the giving of the Torah, there was very limited communication between G-d and the children of Israel, and the world in general. The Midrash uses a parable to illustrate this concept:

"It is likened to a king who decreed that the Romans should not descend to Syria, and the Syrians should not ascend to Rome. Similarly, when G-d created the world, He decreed, 'The heavens are for the L-rd, and the earth He has given to man.' When He desired to give the Torah, He nullified the initial decree and declared, 'The lower ones shall ascend to the higher ones, and the higher ones shall descend to the lower ones.' And it all began with the verse, 'And G-d descended upon Mount Sinai'" (Shemot Rabbah 12:3).

During the giving of the Torah, the Almighty established a line of connection between Himself and the world. The infinite G-d turned to us and gave us the opportunity to communicate with Him. He provided us with 613 phone numbers through which we can reach Him. These 613 "phone numbers" are the commandments; when we fulfill the right commandment at the right time and in the way He instructed us, we establish a connection and bond with the boundless.

G-d made the first move. The next step, as the Midrash continues, is "And to Moses, He said, 'Ascend to the L-rd.'" On that very day, immediately after the giving of the Torah, Moses ascended Mount Sinai and stayed there for forty days. It was during that time that he received the Tablets of the Covenant, upon which the Ten Commandments were inscribed.

## **The Mess Up**

After Moses descended, we all know what happened—the sin of the golden calf. As a result, Moses broke the Tablets, and ultimately, the Almighty gave Moses the second set of Tablets. When did this

happen? When exactly did Moses receive the second Tablets on Mount Sinai and descend with them? This is perhaps not so well-known, but it occurred on Yom Kippur.

Why isn't it widely known? Because when Moses came with the second Tablets, he did it quietly. He entered the Israelite camp and placed the Tablets inside the Ark of the Covenant without anyone seeing or hearing him. It was a discreet and private act.

Why was Moses so discreet? In Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 34:3), Rashi explains that because the first tablets were presented with such fanfare, the evil eye gained control over them. On the second round, therefore, G-d instructed Moses to do it quietly — because there is nothing more beautiful than modesty.

The event of the giving of the Torah was a monumental occasion, a global production on an unprecedented scale. Millions of people gathered to witness the divine revelation on Mount Sinai. There were "thunder and lightning, a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud shofar sound... and the entire Mount Sinai was smoking... and the mountain trembled greatly" (Exodus 19:16-18). The Torah further describes, as we read today, "All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes, the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled and stood from afar" (Exodus 20:15). In the book of Deuteronomy, the Torah adds, "Darkness, cloud, and thick darkness" (Deuteronomy 4:11).

The Midrash adds that the whole world shook when they heard the voice of the Almighty. It was a tremendous event, and as a result, it also caused the evil eye to manifest. Everyone was envious of the Israelites for having the privilege of such a profound divine revelation.

All of this ultimately led to the breaking of the tablets. Therefore, on the second occasion, the Almighty instructed Moses to do it quietly, saying, "There is nothing more beautiful than modesty."

## **Why The Noise?**

The Rebbe raises an interesting question: At first glance, it doesn't make sense. Surely, the Almighty knew that the commotion would lead to the breaking of the tablets. So why didn't He give them secretly from the start? If we are concerned about the evil inclination, why all this commotion in the first place?

The Rebbe explained that the receiving of the Torah needed to be a joyous occasion; it needed to be dramatic so that it would arouse a

sense of celebration among the Jewish people. (Shavuos 5725, Toras Menachem vol. 3 pg. 366).

Of course G-d knew that such noise could lead to negative consequences. However, the giving of the Torah was such an incredibly significant and transformative event that it required a grand commotion. It had to be accompanied by the loudest noise imaginable, so that the entire world would know and hear that there is a G-d.

It was so important because it was the very moment when the Creator of the universe came down from the heavens to speak to us, finite human beings. It was that moment that told us that our actions matter to Him and that He desires a connection with us. Today is the day when this connection was formed; "This day you have become a nation."