

Can Humans 'Communicate' with God?

The answer to the question would seem to be both 'yes' and 'no' - in a single text. This conversation between God and Moses takes place right after the incident of the Golden Calf and Moses' shattering of the first set of tablets.

Exodus 33:11-23

וַדַּבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ וַיָּשָׁב
אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה וּמִשָּׁרְתוֹ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נוּן נָעַר לֹא יָמִישׁ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה
אֶל־יְהוָה רְאֵה אֶתְּהָ אֵמֹר אֵלַי הֲעַל אֶת־הָעַם הַזֶּה וְאַתָּה לֹא הוֹדַעְתָּנִי אֶת
אֲשֶׁר־תִּשְׁלַח עִמִּי וְאַתָּה אֹמְרָת יְדַעְתִּיךָ בְּשֵׁם וְגַם־מִצָּאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינָי: וְעַתָּה
אִם־נָא מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת־דַּרְכְּךָ וְאִדְעֶךָ לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא־חֵן
בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְרָאֵה כִּי עִמָּךְ הִגּוּי הַזֶּה: וַיֹּאמֶר פָּנִי יִלְכוּ וְהִנַּחְתִּי לָךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אִם־אֵין פָּנֶיךָ הֹלְכִים אֶל־תִּתְּעַלְנוּ מִזֶּה: וּבַמָּה יוֹדַע אִפּוּא כִּי־מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
אֲנִי וְעִמָּךְ הֲלוֹא בְּלִכְתָּךְ עִמָּנוּ וְנִפְלִינוּ אֲנִי וְעִמָּךְ מִכָּל־הָעַם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי
הָאֲדָמָה: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֶעֱשֶׂה
כִּי־מִצָּאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינַי וְאִדְעֶךָ בְּשֵׁם: וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרֹאֲנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבֹדְךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי
אֶעֱבִיר כָּל־טוֹבֵי עַל־פְּנֶיךָ וְקָרָאתִי בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְחִנַּתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אַחֲוֹן
וְרַחֲמֹתַי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לְרַאֵת אֶת־פָּנַי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאֵנִי
הָאָדָם וְחָי: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל־הַצּוּר: וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדֶי
וְשַׁמְתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר וְשַׁכַּתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד־עֲבָרִי: וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת־כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ
אֶת־אַחֲרָי וּפְנֵי לֹא יִרְאוּ:

11. And the Eternal One spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he turned again into the camp; but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not from the Tent.

12. And Moses said to the Eternal One, See, You say to me, Bring up this people; and You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, I know you by name, and you have also found grace in my sight.

13. Now therefore, I beg You, if I have found grace in your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You, that I may find grace in Your sight; and consider that this nation is Your people.

14. And God said, My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.

15. And he said to God, If Your presence does not go with me, carry us not from here.

16. For where shall it be known here that I and Your people have found grace in Your sight? Is it not in that You go with us that we are distinct, I and Your people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth?

17. And the Eternal One said to Moses, I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in my sight, and I know you by name.

18. And he said, I beg you, show me Your glory.

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19. And God said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Eternal One before you; but I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

20. And God said, You can not see my face; for no man shall see me and live.

21. And the Eternal One said, Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand upon a rock;

22. And it shall come to pass, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by;

23. And I will take away My hand, and you shall see my back; but My face shall not be seen.

Perhpas we can communicate with God, but our understanding will always fall short.

Job 38

1. Then the Eternal One answered Job from the stormy wind, and said,

2. Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

3. Gird up now your loins like a man; for I will demand of you, and you will answer me.

4. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding.

5. Who determined its measures, do you know? Or who has stretched the line upon it?

6. Upon what are its foundations fastened? Or who laid its corner stone,

7. When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

8. Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth, as if it had issued from the womb,

9. When I made the cloud its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band,

10. And prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors,

11. And said, Thus far shall you come, but no further; and here shall your proud waves be stayed?

12. Have you commanded the morning since your days began; and caused the dawn to know his place,

13. That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it?

The text continues in similar vein until Chapter 40, when God finishes and Job replies:

1. Then the Eternal One answered Job, and said,

2. Shall a reprovor dispute with the Almighty? He who reproaches God let him answer it.

3. Then Job answered the Eternal One, and said,

4. Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer you? I will lay my hand upon my mouth.

5. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer; twice; but I will proceed no further.