



It's Your Choice

The famous sage Rabbi Akiva expressed the paradox of foreknowledge and choice with the words, “Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is granted.”¹ The ability to bear this paradox (in Hebrew, *nesiat hafachim*) is like a marriage (*nisuin*, same root as *nesiat*). It is the meeting point and connection between the masculine element of knowledge and the feminine element of choice. The male is more apt to look at life from above to below (from a perspective of “Torah from Heaven”) and sees that everything is foreseen. The woman, on the other hand, experiences reality from below to Above (with the trajectory of prayer) and sees that “freedom of choice is granted.” For example, on Chanukah, the Torah (in the Talmud) emphasizes the heavenly miracle of the flask of oil, which was not in man’s hands, while the *Al Hanissim* prayer emphasizes the miracle of the victory of the Maccabees in battle, which was predicated on the heroism of the Hasmoneans down below. (The awakening to go out to war and a main part of the self-sacrifice in that war derived from the women). This is also at the root of the male-female relationship Above: “Everything is foreseen” by God, the Only One Who Knows everything” and freedom of choice is granted to the Congregation of Israel.

The balance between these two elements changes from person to person and from time to time: for most people, foresight is predominant: Their lives are experienced as dictated and pre-determined, with choice, if it exists, as being measured and contracted within recognized borders. For *tzaddikim*, however, the main point is the power of choice, which overrides Divine foreknowledge. “A tzaddik decrees and God fulfills his decree, God decrees and the tzaddik nullifies the decree.”² For a servant, the element of foreknowledge is also at the forefront: What happens is what was supposed to happen). The element of choice seems to apply only to the future and the decisions that the servant must make.

The Arizal teaches that as the world progresses, the status of the woman ascends. If at the beginning, her status was lower than the man’s and she was subservient to him (by varying degrees), as time progresses, she progresses to equality with man and ultimately will be higher than him (“A woman of valor is the crown of her husband”).³

Regarding the interplay between foreknowledge and choice, as we progress into the future, the element of choice becomes more predominant in the balance between “Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is granted.” Nobody should feel that his life is pre-

¹ *Pirkei Avot* 3:15.

² According to the verse in Job 22:28.

³ Proverbs 12:4.

determined. Like Abraham, we must “emerge from our astrological calculations”⁴, which predicates our situation on heavenly decrees. We must sense that our lives are in our own hands. As the redemption approaches, we must reveal that “And your People are all tzaddikim.” We are all choosers and influence our own lives and all of reality.

How?

The sages teach that even the offspring, health and life and making a living are not dependent upon a person’s merits, but rather on his *mazal* (destiny). This is certainly true regarding a person’s physical and emotional hereditary traits. “*Mazal*” is not an externally decreed fate, but rather, the unconscious soul root of the person himself, with whom God took counsel prior to the Creation. More specifically, it is with this root of *mazal* that a person chooses his own reality and the conditions of his life for himself.

Awareness of this - which characterizes tzaddikim, who are aware of the upper dimensions of their souls – changes our perspective on reality: I choose my basic conditions of life for myself: If I will be smart or dull, rich or poor, if I will have children or not, if I will be healthy or sickly, a leader or a follower, if I will have a propensity toward good or evil, if I will be beautiful or ugly – and finally – if I will be male or female, which is actually the choice to choose. I myself make these choices from the upper perspective of my soul root, knowing that it is specifically through these choices that I will be able to fulfill my soul’s potential to the utmost.

Thus, we should not flee our choices. Instead, we should uncover their depths and by doing so, invoke the changes that we desire. The more that we perceive reality from this perspective, the easier it is to rise, make changes and bring the redemption. “If they merit” (through choice and human endeavor) “I will hasten it.”⁵

⁴ Rashi quoting the *midrash* on Genesis 15:5.

⁵ *Sanhedrin* 98a.