



VIDEO SCRIPT OF: CHOICE VS FATE

Part 1 of 3

Free will asserts that we human beings have a range of options before us in any given moment and we are free to choose the one that draws us, without coercion or preordination.

Determinism asserts that the all-knowing Creator sees what will be before it transpires and so we are “compelled” by Divinity’s foreknowledge to choose exactly that.

“Free will and determinism are both true, **each in its place**. Where there is free choice there is no place for determinism. Where there is determinism there is no place for free choice.” (R. Isaac Luria, 16th Century Kabbalist)

R. Isaac Luria (Ari), *Arba Meot Shekel Kesef*, at the end (as quoted by R. Tsadok Hakohen, *Tsidkat HaTsadik*, #40).

ששניהם אמת כל אחד במקום בפני עצמו במקום הבחירה שם אין מקום לידיעה, ובמקום הידיעה שם באמת אין מקום לבחירה [ספר צדקת הצדיק - אות מ]

With these words, the Ari (speaking in the 1500's) presents a paradigm for grappling with paradox that modern physics has also adopted to address its own nemesis—the paradoxical nature of light.

Light's irrational behavior has baffled scientists for decades.

Sitting “in this chair” and sending light through *this* obstacle course, it behaves as a wave.

Yet from “that chair,” through *that* course it behaves as a particle.

It's impossible for both to be true...yet it's even more impossible to deny the proof that it is, in fact, true.

Scientists haven't resolved the paradox, but they've managed to work with it, by accepting the irksome but observable fact that:

In conditions where light presents as a wave, there is no place for its particle nature. And in conditions where light presents as a particle, there is no place for its wave-like nature.

This solution echos the Ari’s formula for addressing the paradox of fate vs choice.

Thus the first task in addressing a paradox is to find the sticking point and articulate its mutually exclusive assertions. And (while most of the time) there is no way to resolve them fully, it may be possible to sort them out to some degree.

For example, a metaphor from science can help us do just that with our current paradox.

Quantum Mechanics is science's crowning glory. It is the most successful theory in history. It predicts, with stunning accuracy, the behavior of our subatomic world. There is one feature of this theory that is especially useful in our present discussion.

When observing how light behaves when directed toward a barrier with slits, QM predicts the results with 100% accuracy:

x% will land here, y % there, z% over there. Its predictions are always right.

But when tasked with the job of foretelling in which of these categories an individual photon is going to land before it gets shot toward the barrier...

...that, says Quantum Mechanics is impossible to predict. And not for lack of knowledge but because it is intrinsically unpredictable.

This is where Einstein protested: God does not play dice with the universe.

Einstein believed that if we could measure all the forces bearing upon that photon we would be able to predict its individual behavior as well. Quantum Mechanics said NO! The randomness of this event is a feature of reality itself.

Scientists designed an experiment that would test these two assertions. If Einstein was right the results would be a. If Quantum Mechanics was right the results would be b. The experiment proved Quantum Mechanics.

The final tally of photons is predicted with absolute accuracy. Their individual events are UNpredictable and no amount of information can change that. Its “random” nature is built into the very fabric of our universe.

This parallels the paradox of free will and determinism as articulated in Kabbala.

What is known and predicted with absolute certainty is the final outcome: Every sliver of soul will (eventually) scour its impurities actualize its potentials and cross the finish line squeaky clean. The inviolate rule is: no spark left behind.

R. Tsadok HaKohen in uncountable places, proving the assertion with the verse: לא ידה ממנו נדח (קדמות ושערים - שער ו פרק ט ; ספר לשם שבו ואחלמה - ספר הדעייה חלק ב - דרוש ב ענין ג [אות ד']
R. Shlomo Elyashev,

Yet which wormhole a person will carve out to get from here to there, that is not predetermined but rather depends on our free choice.

That does not mean that every choice we make is free. And even when a choice *is* free, it could still be that we’re “coerced” to choose between, say, two options when, theoretically, thousands of possibilities exist. But it is still a free choice even when we decide between two roads ...because “way leads to way.” That simple pick might seem trivial in the moment, but, as years go by and choices unfold, those two paths diverge more and more and the difference between them grows profound.

So, applying the Ari’s formula, to this first round of resolution: What is determined is the final frame. Failure is not an option—every soul will accomplish its destined tikun. In the place of determinism (ie the finish line), there is no free choice. One cannot opt out of one’s destiny.

What is freely chosen, is the path we take from here to there.

Within every moment there is some place, called a choice-point, where coercive factors are perfectly matched and the only thing that determines which way we proceed is our genuine, authentic and perfectly free choice.

How do these two paradoxical truths (destiny and choice) fit together. A metaphor clarifies: Just as a master chess player uses every move of his opponent to bring him (the master) closer to checkmate, so is HaShem with us. No matter what we chose, HaShem will use that choice to bring us closer to our final destiny—our last frame—our fully completed tikun.

In summary, the Ari suggests a model for grappling with the paradox of choice vs fate. In the place (or phase of life) where choice rules there is no place for determinism. Whereas in the place (or phase of life) where determinism rules, there is no place for choice.

As we learned, the phase of life where choice rules is while we are still growing, evolving, actualizing potential and dissolving impurities. In short, while we are a work in progress.

The phase of life where fate rules is our glorious, inevitable, and inescapable ending. “That final outcome (or last frame) is the vision that arose in thought at the very beginning.”

In the next installment, we will explore another way of applying the Ari’s rule.