



Choice vs Fate #3

The Reconciliation of Free Choice and Divine Omniscience

We human beings need to know that our choices are real. That we are not puppets. That we forge our destiny. That when we grapple with temptation and choose the high road, we deserve credit for that.

But how does that jibe with belief in an omniscient God. For if the Creator *knows* what I am going to pick before I choose it, then clearly my choice is preordained.

Knowing, by definition, at least by kabbalistic definition, is to integrate awareness so deeply that it seeps into the nerve net and even changes ones reflexes.

If HaShem *knows* what we are going to pick before we choose it, then we, (as slivers of Divinity) are compelled to choose in accordance with that foreknowledge.

Hashem is to creation as the soul is to the body [TB Brochot 10a]. Just as our *knowing* compels our body's actions, so does HaShem's *knowing* compel His body's actions... yet His body (so to speak) is creation, ie us.

This dilemma parallels the argument between Einstein and Quantum Mechanics concerning the predictability of photons sent through an obstacle course. Quantum Mechanics insisted that one could predict with near perfect accuracy the summated results of thousands of events/photons, but where any individual photon would land...that was absolutely unpredictable, and not for lack of information but because this unknowability is built into the structure of the universe.

Einstein said, no way. G-d does not play dice with the universe.

He insisted that the problem was lack of knowledge. If we could measure *all* the forces impinging on that photon then it would be possible to predict the outcome of its individual event with as much accuracy as the final tally.

A very clever experiment proved Einstein wrong, and Quantum Mechanics right. (as discussed at length in lesson 1 of this series).

Still, if we apply Einstein's argument to our paradox of Choice and Fate, we arrive at a solution that is often proffered to solve our dilemma:

Substituting human beings for the "photons" of Quantum Mechanics it is argued that since God (by definition) knows all the forces at play, He can certainly predict, with 100% accuracy, both our individual choices as well as our collective outcomes.

The argument goes that: Since we ourselves, cannot begin to comprehend incalculable forces that impinge upon our psyche and that actually (invisibly) compel us to choose this or that...so consequently, we experience our choice as free. But, in fact, (says this model) it is actually an inescapable consequence of the forces at play (including Divinity's foreknowledge).

The problem with this solution is that, first of all, Einstein's argument was proven wrong (as discussed in lesson 1).

And second, if that is true then, in the end, there really is no free choice. There is the illusion of free choice—a compelling illusion—but it's really just a mirage. And in that case, why should a doer of evil suffer consequences for his misdeeds since (according to this model) HaShem was the one pulling his strings.

The Talmud asserts, “One who is coerced to sin, is free of its legal consequences.”

From this perspective neither the credits nor the debits are rightly ours.

Yet, there is another way to resolve our paradox that preserves the actuality of free choice without violating the principle of Divine omniscience (and it's also consistent with the experiment that proved Einstein wrong).

Most are familiar with the kabbalistic teaching of *tsimtsum* (the primordial act of Divine concealment):

The story goes that: Before *the beginning*, G-d's Infinite Light was everywhere. It was impossible for worlds to emerge for they could not maintain their boundaries in the face of this almighty illumination. They would instantly disintegrate like a wineglass shatters from the impact of water gushing from a fire hose.

God's first step was to conceal His All-Presence from a circumscribed space, creating a dark spherical void now free to be filled by something else. This vacated space became the primordial womb for creation's unfolding.

Into its hollow depths *HaShem* emanated a single ray of light, the unfolding of which is the history and evolution of creation as we know it. This primal act of concealment is called *tsimtsum*.

There is nothing preventing HaShem from shining His presence back into this void and absorbing creation back into non-existence. Nothing, that is, except His own will for creation to succeed. More than HaShem wants to manifest His absolute oneness by illuminating every point of time and space...more than that, He wants creation to accomplish its purpose...the aim that motivated the act of *tsimtsum* in the first place. He wants us to earn the consummate union with HaShem that is only, finally attained after refining our desires and thereby mastering the gift (and the burden) of free choice.

Now (and this is the key), in the same way that HaShem withdraws and conceals His all-Presence to create the space for our physical existence, so does He withdraw and conceal His all-knowingness to create the space for our free choice.

HaShem is not intrinsically limited from knowing what will be before it happens (and thereby forcing its unfolding along that path). But more than He wants to control this aspect of creation He wants human beings to have true free choice. The larger purpose of creation requires that (as we'll explore in future videos). This is a teaching from the Ohr HaChayaim [Gen. 6:5].

HaShem could certainly direct His *daat* (the kabbalistic term for His all-knowing-ness) to our decision making moments but instead HaShem has decided not to peek. He averts His glance

(so to speak) until we choose, and then responds providentially to assure that whatever we chose, it will bring us forward toward our final destiny at least a micro-step.

In summary. There is no getting around it, if HaShem knows what we are going to pick, then we do not have free will. We have the illusion of choice, but we are actually compelled by circumstance and Divine foreknowledge to choose as we did.

And if we don't really choose, then why should we be punished for bad choices and rewarded for good. Life becomes a charade.

Ohr HaChayim explains that, yes, HaShem could certainly know what we are going to pick before we choose it. Yet, in the same way that HaShem withdraws and conceals His all-presence to make space for our physical existence, so does he withdraw and conceal His all-knowingness to make space for our free choice.

More than HaShem wants to manifest His Oneness through every point of time and space, He wants creation to earn its rewards through the enlightening challenge of mastering free choice.