

What is freedom of choice?

Isaac Bashevis Singer - We must believe in **free** will — we have no other **choice**.

Text 1

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Genesis, 1:26)

Text 2

Behold, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil... I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. You shall choose life, so that you and your children will live.
(Deuteronomy 30:15-19)

Text 3

Everything is in the hands of heaven except for a person's awe of heaven. (Talmud, Berachot 33b)

Text 4

Halacha 1

Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his.

This is [the intent of] the Torah's statement ([Genesis 3:22](#)): "Behold, man has become unique as ourselves, knowing good and evil," i.e., the human species became singular in the world with no other species resembling it in the following quality: that man can, on his own initiative, with his knowledge and thought, know good and evil, and do what he desires. There is no one who can prevent him from doing good or bad. Accordingly, [there was a need to drive him from the Garden of Eden,] "lest he stretch out his hand [and take from the tree of life]."

Halacha 2

A person should not entertain the thesis held by the fools among the gentiles and the majority of the undeveloped among Israel that, at the time of a man's creation, The Holy One, blessed be He, decrees whether he will be righteous or wicked.

This is untrue. Each person is fit to be righteous like Moses, our teacher, or wicked, like Jeroboam. [Similarly,] he may be wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, miserly or generous, or [acquire] any other character traits. There is no one who compels him, sentences him, or leads him towards either of these two paths. Rather, he, on his own initiative and decision, tends to the path he chooses.

This was [implied by the prophet,] Jeremiah who stated [Eichah 3:38: "From the mouth of the Most High, neither evil or good come forth." Accordingly, it is the sinner, himself, who causes his own loss.

Halacha 3

This principle is a fundamental concept and a pillar [on which rests the totality] of the Torah and mitzvot as [[Deuteronomy 30:15](#)] states: "Behold, I have set before you today life [and good, death and evil]." Similarly, [[Deuteronomy 11:26](#)] states, "Behold, I have set before you today [the blessing and the curse]," implying that the choice is in your hands.

Any one of the deeds of men which a person desires to do, he may, whether good or evil. Therefore, [[Deuteronomy 5:26](#)] states:

"If only their hearts would always remain this way." From this, we can infer that the Creator does not compel or decree that people should do either good or bad. Rather, everything is left to their [own choice].

To what extent to our choices determine the outcomes?

Text 5

Then Joseph said to his brothers..."I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that God sent me before you. (Genesis 45:4-5) You did not send me here, God did, and made me an adviser to Pharaoh, a lord over all his household, and a ruler over the entire land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:8) Am I in G-d's place [to judge you?] Indeed, you intended evil against me, [but] G-d designed it for good... (Genesis 50:29-20)

What is the purpose of free choice?

Text 6

...Observe the commandments of the Lord, your G-d, and go in His ways. (Deuteronomy 28:9)

We are commanded to emulate G-d, blessed be He, to the best of our ability. The source of this commandment is G-d's statement, "And you shall go in His ways." (Maimonides, Book of Commandments)

One should be similar to G-d; just as He is compassionate and merciful so should you be. (Talmud, Shabbat 133b)

Text 7

A person should not wonder: How is it possible for one to do whatever he wants and be responsible for his own deeds? - Is it possible for anything to happen in this world without the permission and desire of its Creator as [\[Psalms 135:6\]](#) states: "Whatever God wishes, He has done in the heavens and in the earth?"

One must know that everything is done in accord with His will and, nevertheless, we are responsible for our deeds.

How is this [apparent contradiction] resolved? Just as the Creator desired that [the elements of] fire and wind rise upward and [those of] water and earth descend downward, that the heavenly spheres revolve in a circular orbit, and all the other creations of the world follow the nature which He desired for them, so too, He desired that man have free choice and be responsible for his deeds, without being pulled or forced. Rather, he, on his own initiative, with the knowledge which God has granted him, will do anything that man is able to do.

Therefore, he is judged according to his deeds. If he does good, he is treated with beneficence. If he does bad, he is treated harshly. This is implied by the prophets' statements: "This has been the doing of your hands" [\[Malachi 1:9\]](#); "They also have chosen their own paths" [\[Isaiah 66:3\]](#).

Halacha 5

One might ask: Since The Holy One, blessed be He, knows everything that will occur before it comes to pass, does He or does He not know whether a person will be righteous or wicked?

If He knows that he will be righteous, [it appears] impossible for him not to be righteous. However, if one would say that despite His knowledge that he would be righteous, it is possible for him to be wicked, then His knowledge would be incomplete.

Know that the resolution to this question [can be described as]: "Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." Many great and fundamental principles and lofty concepts are dependent upon it. However, the statements that I will make must be known and understood [as a basis for the comprehension of this matter].

As explained in the second chapter of *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*, The Holy One, blessed be He, does not know with a knowledge that is external from Him as do men, whose knowledge and selves are two [different entities]. Rather, He, may His name be praised, and His knowledge are one.

Human knowledge cannot comprehend this concept in its entirety for just as it is beyond the potential of man to comprehend and conceive the essential nature of the Creator, as [\[Exodus 33:20\]](#) states: "No man will perceive, Me and live," so, too, it is beyond man's potential to comprehend and conceive the Creator's knowledge. This was the intent of the prophet's [\[Isaiah 55:8\]](#) statements: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways, My ways."

Accordingly, we do not have the potential to conceive how The Holy One, blessed be He, knows all the creations and their deeds. However, this is known without any doubt: That man's actions are in his [own] hands and The Holy One, blessed be He, does not lead him [in a particular direction] or decree that he do anything.

This matter is known, not only as a tradition of faith, but also, through clear proofs from the words of wisdom. Consequently, the prophets taught that a person is judged for his deeds, according to his deeds - whether good or bad. This is a fundamental principle on which is dependent all the words of prophecy.

Text 9

Raavad Hilchos Teshuva Perek 5

השגות הראב"ד: וכיון שכן הוא אין בנו כח לידע היאך ידע הקב"ה כל הברואים ומעשה ידיהם א"א לא נהג זה המחבר מנהג החכמים שאין אדם מתחיל בדבר ולא ידע להשלימו והוא החל בשאלות קושיות והניח הדבר בקושיא והחזירו לאמונה וטוב היה לו להניח הדבר בתמימות התמימים ולא יעורר לבם ויניח דעתם בספק ואולי שעה אחת יבא הרהור בלבם על זה ואע"פ שאין תשובה נצחת על זה טוב הוא לסמוך לו קצת תשובה ואומר אם היו צדקת האדם ורשעתו תלויים בגזירת הבורא ית' היינו אומרים שידיעתו היא גזירתו והיתה לנו השאלה קשה מאד ועכשיו שהבורא הסיר זו הממשלה מידו ומסרה ביד האדם עצמו אין ידיעתו גזירה אבל היא כידיעת האצטגנינים שידעים מכאן אחר מה יהיו דרכיו של זה... וכל זה איננו שוה.

לקוטי שיחות חלק ז עמוד 563 (מכתב כב טבת תש"ט): ראובן יודע עתידות שיגיד בנוגע לשמעון הנמצא בקצוי תבל (היינו שא"א שישפיע עליו בשום אופן), מעשיו ופעולותיו שבעתיד, אין אמירתו משפעת על בחירתו של שמעון. אלא שראובן יודע ששמעון יבחר בבחירתו החפשית אופן זה. היינו שבחירתו של שמעון משנה את ידיעתו של ראובן ולא להיפך. הבחירה היא הסיבה והידיעה המסובב, והוא ממש כמו הידיעה הבאה אחר הבחירה, שפשיטא דאין סותרים זא"ז, מפני שהבחירה היתה חפשית כי לא הושפעה מהידיעה ואדרבה הידיעה תלויה בתוצאות הבחירה וזהו, כביכול, אופן ידיעת הקב"ה. וכמרז"ל (ירוש' ר"ה פ"א ה"ג שם סוף יומא): הקב"ה רואה את הנולד. ואם תאמר כיון שהבחירה היא חפשית לגמרי א"כ איך אפשר לדעת מקודם במה יבחר - ע"ז תירץ הרמב"ם שם שאין ידיעת הקב"ה כידיעתנו ואין בנו כח לידע איך ידע הקב"ה.

B"H
Rabbi Nosson Potash
Lunch and Learn - Chabad of Cole Valley
27 Shevat 5775 – Feb 16, 2015

General points

וחותם יד כל אדם בו