Rehashing the Free Will Question

By: GEDALIA MEYER

It's not the oldest question in Judaism. It may not be the most important. It certainly isn't the one that draws the most interest. It's not even strictly Jewish, being as Christians, Muslims, and plenty of people with no religious beliefs whatsoever have a major stake in both the question and the possible answers. But somehow, when all the dust clears, this question cuts to the heart of Judaism, monotheistic belief, and the essence of what it is to be human. It's the free will question.

Let's refresh our memories One of the most personal of experiences is that of freedom of choice. We sense this ability within us every single time we make a decision. We sense that it is "I" that is making that choice and that we are not absolutely compelled by any force, either external or internal. While the lack of internal forces may be debatable, we still believe it to be among the clearest feelings of life. This is the free will experience.

Judaism and other religions confirm this experiential proof with solid backing from Scripture and from tradition. The strongest argument, and the one that is almost invariably employed in defense of free will, is the firmly rooted belief in individual and communal responsibility. It almost goes without saying that moral responsibility makes no sense if there is no free will. How can a person or a group be held responsible for their actions without the ability to make their own moral choices? This argument is considered so solid that it usually is taken as a given without any need for further explanation.

On the other hand, there is a counter-argument to this seemingly irrefutable position. This, of course, is the belief that God is perfect in all ways and cannot lack anything, certainly not knowledge of any aspect of creation. Included in this package of perfection is the knowledge of human actions. Included in that, so the dogma goes, is timelessness of this knowledge—that God does not become aware of it as it happens but that God has always possessed this knowledge despite its not having occurred yet in the historical sequence of events that we call "time." According to this, God must know what we are going to do "before" we do it. If that is so, how can we have free will? If God knows that a person will or will not do a certain deed, how can they not do exactly as God knows? If they "must" behave accordingly, how do they really have free will?

Gedalia Meyer is an American rabbi living in Ma'ale Adumim, Israel.

This is the question in a nutshell. It has been restated countless times by theologians and philosophers, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The open and burning issue, of course, is the answer. That there must be an answer is taken as a given by almost all who have dealt with the question. Not answering the question or admitting that the question has no answer is generally not considered a serious option. But the question seems intractable—getting rid of either one side or the other destroys either a pillar of religious belief or an immutable experiential fact, or both. There must be a compromise solution. There must be some way of satisfying both sides, so that God remains God while human beings remain human. What is it?

Non-Jewish Solutions

In its original (Greek) format, the free will question took on a slightly different form. The Greek philosophers were intensely interested in the nature of human free will. It was among the great issues to be understood. They recognized what was at stake. A completely deterministic world in which either (meta)physical forces or supernatural gods controlled everything, left no room for human choice and moral responsibility. But free choice required some mechanism to extricate it from the bonds of determinacy. Aristotle was among the earliest to postulate that there must be some things that are not subject to deterministic forces, though the exact source of these things was vague. It was left to "chance"—a wild-card in the deterministic universe that allowed a certain amount of wiggle room in the great chain of causation that controlled all things.

It was Epicurus,[1] the 3rd-century philosopher, who created some sort of mechanism for how this could happen. Though most of his writings are no longer extant and we know of much of them only second hand, we can confidently say that he believed in a possibility of free will.

> Fate, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, he (the wise man) scorns, affirming rather that some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency. For he sees that necessity destroys responsibility and that chance is inconstant;

[1] This, of course, is the man whose fame in Judaism rests with his association with the word *apikoros*, the Jewish term for a heretic. Some might identify this as a great irony of Judaism, being as Epicurus was the ancient champion of free will, which forms one of the pillars of Jewish morality and the Torah's notion of human responsibility. The association probably came about through Epicurus' idea that the goal of life is the pursuit of pleasure. Epicurus understood this as leading a good life guided by wisdom and morality, and not to be an *apikoros*. The Mishna (*Sanhedrin* 10:1) which lists those who lose their portion in the World-to-Come, includes an *apikoros* in the ill-fated group.

> whereas our own actions are autonomous, and it is to them that praise and blame naturally attach. (Letter to Menoeceus)

Thus, fate, or determinism, allows for no free choice, while chance, or indeterminacy, is "inconstant" and unpredictable. The third path of "autonomous" actions is the only one available for free will. Later writers explain the mechanism for this autonomy through the "swerving" of certain things that would otherwise be caught in the deterministic chain. Though it is unclear what this "swerving" really is, to say nothing of what causes it, if anything, it is certainly the source for our free will.

These considerations set the stage for the great debate on free will and determinism, a debate that would never really be resolved and very possibly was never improved upon. It has forever boiled down to the competing notions of determinacy in nature versus free choice in the mind. The only options to extricate free will from deterministic forces are through either indeterminacy—a vague idea that things can happen randomly, outside of the guidance of natural forces, or by some even vaguer idea like "autonomy," which has never been explicable through natural means.

To understand the question is to understand these three possibilities. Determinism means that everything has a cause and that all causes can be traced to some point of origin. That origin may be God or it may be the Big Bang, but it all starts from there. Everything was determined from the initial conditions of that original state and from the laws that guide things along their unswerving paths. How these initial conditions came about and what agency created the laws that everything must follow are questions that will probably never be answered. To the religious the answer is as obvious as it is vague—the answer is God. To the atheist, who cannot abide by such sleight-of-hand, the answer is ultimately meaningless since that is the way things are. According to strict determinism, nothing exists outside this deterministic framework. It may not seem that this should be the case, but so it is. Free will, according to this unforgiving rigidity, cannot exist. All is fate, or pre-determined, or whatever one chooses to call it.

The indeterministic outlook does not necessarily disagree with much of this, but it does allow room for a certain amount of randomness. Randomness is a buzzword for indeterminism. It essentially means that not everything has to follow the rules laid down by determinism. Certain things simply do their own thing, regardless of the rules that everything else must abide by. How exactly this happens is anything but clear. What makes things happen in this non-deterministic state has never been explained. It happens, however, that there has almost always been a non-deterministic component in human worldviews. While things obviously

do happen in a regular and predictable manner, and there have to be rules that regulate the unfolding of the universe, there was an equally obvious component that did not fit into the rules. It was the exceptional philosophy—the stoics of ancient Greece and the scientists of the pre-quantum mechanics era of physics—that struggled to maintain their belief in a deterministic universe.

With quantum mechanics, that all came crashing down. Inherent in the "laws" of quantum mechanics was a random element that lay at its very core. While deterministic rules guided the larger things like planets and life forms and molecules, on the quantum level of particles and forces, things only happened because they did and not because they were following some preordained path. While this may seem odd to most people even almost 100 years after this was discovered and after countless quantum effects have been put to daily use in our lives, it remains a quantum fact. Many scientists harbor secret expectations that there lies a hidden order beneath the quantum randomness. How else could a particle "know" when to radiate or to disintegrate? But others say that this is a pipedream of those who cannot accept what they cannot understand. At the bottom of it all, it is all indeterminate. Determinism, and the rules of nature, are really just a grand cover-up for the randomness that lies underneath.

The third component, "autonomy," has never been explained, even as equations were put to its siblings. Epicurus' swerving atoms idea was never improved upon. Nobody has the vaguest idea how to explain how this "autonomy" can come about, either from the deterministic forces of nature or the indeterministic chaos of randomness. To a great degree, the scientific and philosophical world has dropped the third component from their worldview. According to this, free will, if it does exist, must come from either the deterministic component, which seems impossible, or the indeterministic component, which seems contradictory to experience. This is the question in a nutshell from a secular standpoint: How does free will arise from either component, or from some combination of the two?

Ingenious theories have been proposed over the past few centuries to deal with this problem. The most promising avenue has come under the umbrella term "compatibilism"—a vague idea that claims free will is indeed "compatible" with determinism. How this is so has never been fully worked out, but there are enough variations on the idea to fill 1000-page books with the dense language of philosophy, science, and linguistics. It essentially boils down to a half-baked version of free will that is "free" in the sense that we are aware of ourselves making choices, but blissfully unaware that those choices are really determined by hidden conditions and forces in our brains. The driving force behind this is obvious. No

scientist or philosopher, no matter how atheist or materialist he or she may be, is content with human free will going the way of the typewriter. There would be no moral responsibility and no accountability for our actions. The child molester and the rapist and the axe murderer are just doing what nature dictates. There is no more justification to punish them than there is to punish a rock rolling down the hill in a landslide. An almost religious belief compels these heretical atheists to clutch onto the straw of free will. But it is all for naught.

The alternative is to maintain that free will arises from the indeterminate component, the randomness. While this holds the advantage of not being preordained and open for anything, it holds the equally obvious disadvantage of not really being a conscious "choice" at all, but a random fluctuation in the quantum states of the mind/brain that creates the illusion of a choice. We can believe that we are making a choice, but in the end it is just some random blip on an otherwise deterministic screen. Combinations of determinism and chance are of course thrown into the mix, but all to no avail. They only narrow down the field in which the exact "moment" of decision comes about. But in the end those choices still lie within that chasm between determinism and indeterminism.

Because of this problem which has been known since ancient times, it was obvious that another factor be brought in to provide a source for the autonomy. This factor, or course, is God. God could create the deterministic laws, make sure it all functioned on schedule, and even throw in some random or miraculous effects to keep things from getting too humdrum. With God no unanswered questions needed to be resolved. God handled it all. God dealt out free will in the same way that God made the natural laws. To the religious, all the way back to ancient times, it was obvious that free will was impossible without some supernatural force.

But belief in God came with its own set of problems. While God should have no problem dishing out free will to selected recipients, God's inherent perfection and infinite knowledge threatened to eliminate the very freedom that He granted. This was a strictly religious problem. Secular authorities from the Greeks down to the scientists really didn't have to worry about it. If they did, it was their own choice. Even the Bible was vague on God's foreknowledge. But as time wore on and God became entrenched in a theological corner, the problem loomed ever closer.

It was the Christian fathers of late antiquity and early Byzantium who first tackled the problem head on. First Augustine (early 5th century) and then Boethius (early 6th century) advanced the answer that would dominate the Christian resolution to the problem for over 1,000 years. This solution was the observation/belief that God was not subject to the same time constraints that were imposed on creation, and by extension, on all

free will decisions. Creation was subject to time flowing in a very definite sequence from past to present to future. That a decision would be made implied that at some point in time the decision had not been made. God's foreknowledge of the decision, a necessity of God's inherent perfection, was a consequence of God's not existing within the past-present-future continuum. God exists outside of the temporal dimension and thus cannot really be said to "know something in advance." There is no "advance" for God, but there is for us. The whole question, according to this, was founded upon an absurdity—that God exists within the dimension of time. When this assumption is dropped, the problem falls away.

Or does it? It turns out that this answer, ingenious as it may be, suffers from the same shortcoming that virtually all answers to the problem would have—namely that they do not really solve the problem. While it may be true that in our world of time we have free will, in God's timeless world we do not. From God's perspective all of our choices are known as a timeless fact. We really cannot do other than what God knows to be the choice, no matter how much the created illusion of time allows us to believe that the outcome is up in the air. Free will thus exists from our perspective but not from God's. Is this really free will or is it a grand illusion made to look like free will? This increasingly finer honing in on the two sides—either our own free choice or God's foreknowledge—would haunt all future answers to the question. The answers will seem right from a limited perspective, but upon broader consideration will be revealed to have shortcomings.

It wouldn't be until the 16th century that a serious alternative would emerge from the non-Jewish world. This alternative came from a Spanish theologian named Luis de Molina who is credited with introducing the concept of "middle knowledge" into the discussion about God's foreknowledge. The basic scheme is that God possesses three types of knowledge:

1) Natural knowledge: knowledge of all truths that are independent of God's will or human choices. Examples of this include 1 + 1 = 2 and all other forms of fundamental logic that seems impossible to be untrue;
2) Middle knowledge: the knowledge of the outcome of any free choice under any given situation;
3) Free knowledge: knowledge concerning the way the world actually was, is, and will be. This knowledge is contingent upon the will of God making certain things happen and others not.

God's knowledge of the first two takes effect before creation. Thus God knows "in advance" the result of every possible free will choice. This

does not mean that the choices are made under some form of divine compulsion, but that God knows each one as a free choice made by a freely thinking entity. However, since God's knowledge of them takes place before creation, it is correct to say that God has foreknowledge of human choices. It is as if those choices take place in a potential dimension that precedes the created world, though not, strictly speaking, in the scale of time. They are free choices, but God knows what they will be before they happen in the created dimension of time.

The problem with this rather clever idea is figuring out how God really knows the middle knowledge. If God only knows it by observation of the choice taking place, then God has no foreknowledge. If God somehow knows how it is "programmed" to be made, then it isn't really a free choice at all. There seems to be no way of God knowing them that fits between the limits of foreknowledge and free will. But this is squarely where it must fit in. Many answers have been proposed for this question by the so-called "Molinists" who have incorporated this idea into their belief system. Molina himself said that God's infinite power of cognition enables Him to get around this problem. This, of course, is the hole in this otherwise gallant attempt to solve the problem. As we shall see, Judaism had its own version of this idea.

Since that time, two philosophical approaches have dominated the non-Jewish outlook on the problem. One is "compatibilism" in its many forms and flavors. The other is a steady trend towards rejection of free will altogether. The reason for the latter answer is not because of a strong belief in God's foreknowledge. The people advocating it generally have no concept of God whatsoever. Rather, it is because free will can have no place in a completely physical universe controlled by deterministic forces, however indeterminant they may be at their core.

This trend has been bolstered by the growing field of neurology in which inroads are being made to trace thought processes as they take place in the brain. Among the many findings of this still-incomplete science is that "decisions" can be detected a short time before they take place in reality. This indicates that they are "made" before they "happen." Many scientists and philosophers interpret this to mean that the results of the choices are already "hard wired" into the various networks of the brain and therefore are not really choices at all.

If anything, this highly debatable conclusion reveals the direction in which things are headed—towards the inevitable machine-like mind, which has no power to make free will choices and is really nothing but a glorified computer. The advocates of this system, among whom Sam Harris has emerged as a popular spokesman with his short work "Free Will," have an almost religious need to maintain a belief in moral responsibility

despite their uncomfortable awareness of it having no real place in their system. Harris' remarkably simplistic book can be summed up in one sentence: We don't have free will since science proves that it doesn't exist, but we should still try to be decent people. Atheists like Harris maintain this belief for obvious reasons, but it is really nothing more than an act of faith. This is the modern dilemma: there is no free will, but we must act as if there is.[2] How are we to continue playing this game in the face of mounting scientific and philosophical evidence that it is a fantasy?

The Jewish Answers: Background

To explore the Jewish answers, we must first ascertain that there is a Jewish question. In the Torah it is clear that free will exists and that it is vital to Judaism. "See, today I have placed before you life and goodness and death and evil... I call upon the heavens and the earth to testify to you that I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse, and you should choose life in order that you and your descendants live" (Deuteronomy 30:15,19). These verses are almost universally understood as a verification of free will and the almost divine power it imparts to those who use it wisely. While it is hard to find other verses in Tanakh that speak this clearly about this vital matter, there are hundreds that confirm its necessity. To deny the existence of free will is tantamount to denying the Torah.

The second component of the problem, divine foreknowledge, is much less evident. While there is no shortage of verses that suggest God knowing the future, there are probably an equal number that demonstrate the exact opposite. How many times in the Torah do we find God displaying an emotional reaction to something man has done? If God knew this in advance, why is this reaction appropriate? Of course the standard reply to this is that the Torah speaks in anthropomorphist terms and God really has no such reaction. But to maintain this position requires a leap of faith. The simple reading of the text demonstrates nothing of the sort. It was only with the long and gradual process of Jewish tradition that the

---

[2] A recent article in the June, 2016 edition of *The Atlantic* (http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/theres-no-such-thing-as-free-will/480750/?utm_source=nl-atlantic-magazine-051716) titled, "There's No Such Thing as Free Will—But we're better off believing in it anyway," a title that itself speaks volumes, mentions an Israeli philosophy professor named Saul Smilansky who "is convinced that free will does not exist in the traditional sense—and that it would be very bad if most people realized this." His basic contention, which he calls "illusionism," is summed up by the author as: "The idea of determinism, and the facts supporting it, must be kept confined within the ivory tower. Only the initiated, behind those walls, should dare to," as he put it to me, "look the dark truth in the face."

anthropomorphic interpretation set in as acceptable and then mandatory. In Biblical times, we have no guarantee that God knew the outcome of a human choice before it was made.

Certainly by late Second Temple times the verdict had been decided solidly in favor of an omnipotent and omniscient God who not only knew the ultimate future and guided the world along its inevitable path, but also influenced the minds of His servants. Though traces of this can be found in Biblical books like Isaiah, it is most clearly evident in the sectarian documents of the Dead Sea scrolls. These scrolls, written between 2,200 and 1,900 years ago, depict, among other things, the beliefs of the Jews who wrote them. While we may not know exactly who they were, we do know that they were Jews living during the Second Temple period and their views represent at least a sampling of where Judaism was in those years.

So what do these documents say about our subject? Two of them in particular deal with free will. The first, commonly called the "*Community Rule*" scroll,[3] describes the rules of the sect that authored the scroll. In column 3 it goes into a long digression on the theological underpinnings of the sect which is both fascinating and a little baffling. Towards the beginning of this is the following:

> From the God of knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before they ever existed He established their whole design, and when, as ordained for them, they come into being, it is in accordance with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change. The laws of all things are in His hand, and he provides them with all their needs.

Fragments of another scroll which seems to have paralleled the *Community Rule* scroll reveal a similar outlook. This scroll is known as the "*Damascus Document*"[4] since it refers to Damascus several times. In column 2 we find the following:

---

[3] This was one of the original seven scrolls found around 1946 in what is now known as Cave 1. The scroll is more or less complete and quite readable if one is accustomed to the unusual "Qumran script" with which most of the scrolls and fragments are written. It is not easy to translate the words even when the letters can be discerned. There are many translations of this and other sectarian scrolls, making them available to the non-scholarly public.

[4] This scroll was the only sectarian scroll that was known prior to the discovery of the cave library in the 40's and 50's. It had been found in the Cairo Genizah in the 1890's by Solomon Schechter. It was originally believed to have been a Karaite document dating from around 1000 years ago. When fragments of this document were found at the Dead Sea dating back to at least 2000 years ago, it became clear that it was of similar nature to the *Community Rule* scroll.

> For God rejected them (the wicked) from the beginning of the world and before they were established He knew their deeds. And He despised their generations from before and hid His face from the earth until they were finished off. And He knew the years of their existence and the number and explanation of their end for all ages and what would be until their end for all the years of the world.

Whatever else one might say about these scrolls, the absolute foreknowledge of God is clear. Both scrolls suggest elements of human free will, though its true nature is rather vague. The *Damascus Document* in particular seems to speak of the very problem we are hoping to solve, though it appears to make no attempt to actually solve it. It seems as if the authors were satisfied with the theological contradiction and saw no need to explain it in some manner that we might consider logical.

The next evidence of the problem is found in the Mishna (*Avot* 3:14) where Rabbi Akiva is quoted in the famous expression, "All is (fore)seen and dominion (of choice) is given to people." This is commonly understood to be the dilemma in all its glory, expressed as a fact of creation with no solution. Rashi, however, does not read the word *tzafoi* as meaning "foreseen" but as "observed," or "seen," so, according to him, there is no theological problem suggested in this Mishna. Rambam reads it as "foreseen" and understands the Mishna to be addressing the problem but not necessarily answering it.

What is perhaps the most remarkable thing about this prescient statement of Rabbi Akiva is that it goes virtually unnoticed in Talmudic and Midrashic discussions. There is no back and forth on it in the Talmud and only scant repetition of it in other early sources. In the 4th- or 5th-century alternate version of *Avot*, known as *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* (ch. 39) we find a slightly different wording: "Everything is *tzafoi*, everything is *galoi* (revealed), and all is according to the *da'ato* (mind, opinion) of the person." What exactly this final phrase means is unclear. It may be nothing more than a rewording of the original statement but it may mean something else entirely. Perhaps it indicates that human beings control their own destiny more than may be apparent. Even though everything is foreseen and revealed, we still possess the power to choose, if we believe it to be so. Perhaps this obscure statement suggests a new possibility—that free will may be real or it may not be real, it all depends on how we see things.

Rav Saadia: The First Answer

Rav Saadia Gaon (*Emunot v-Deot* ch. 4, 10th century) was the first known Jewish writer to directly ask and answer this question. What Jewish thinkers were doing with the question during the 800 years between Rabbi

Akiva and Rav Saadia is anybody's guess. Perhaps they didn't assume it to be a question worth delving into. Perhaps they felt it had no answer. Perhaps the answer was obvious. Either way, it was left to Rav Saadia, generally recognized as the founder of Jewish philosophy, to address this question and present the outline of an answer that would directly or indirectly influence almost all subsequent opinions. He asks the question in its classic format: If God knows what a person will do how can that person do otherwise? So they can't really have free will. But if that is the case, why are they held responsible for their actions? His answer, which is somewhat vague, goes along these lines:

1) God's knowledge of the future is not the cause of future events.
2) God's knows the future as it will be, whether as a natural creation process or as a free will process.
3) When we say that God knows what a person will choose, it means that God knows it will happen as a result of a free will choice and not as a result of a preordained cause.

While it is admittedly not easy to read all this in Rav Saadia's words,[5] it is probably along the lines of what he intended. What the answer is, however, is another matter entirely. Point 1 is something that will be repeated in a few of the future Jewish answers. It is a crucial philosophical idea that stresses the important difference between a cause and an observation. God's knowledge is an act of observation and not a cause. This is the same as God's (or a person's) knowledge of the past. Obviously, one can know the past without influencing the past. The same applies to the future, even though it appears to be counterintuitive to us. Is this a Jewish version of the timeless answer of Boethius? It is possible, but that crucial point is missing from the words.

More likely, Rav Saadia is probably anticipating the "middle knowledge" answer of Molina. The second and third points seem to suggest that direction, though again, it would be nice if it was clearer in the text. This would not be the only time that this approach would be used

---

[5] שאם היתה ידיעת הבורא את הדבר סבה להיותו, היו הדברים קדמונים, מפני שידיעתו אותם קדמונית לא סרו, מפני שלא סר יודע אותם. אבל נחשוב שהוא יודע הדברים על אמתת הויתם, ומה שיש מהם ממה שיחדשהו הוא כבר ידע שיחדשהו, ומה שיש מהם מה שיבחרהו האדם, כבר ידע שהאדם יבחרהו. ואם יאמר, וכאשר ידע הבורא שהאדם עתיד לדבר, היתכן שיחריש או שישתוק? נאמר בלשון צח, כי האדם אלו היה שישתוק תמורה שידבר, היינו משימים בעקר המאמר, כי הבורא ידע שהאדם עתיד לשתוק, ולא היה נכון שנשים שהוא ידע שהאדם עתיד לדבר, כי הוא ידע העולה מפעל האדם הנופל אחר כל מחשבה והקדמה ואיחור, והוא בעצמו אשר ידעו, וכמו שאמר (בתהלים צ"ד) י"י יודע מחשבות אדם.

by Jewish thinkers. Unfortunately, neither Rav Saadia nor any of the others sheds additional light on how God possesses this foreknowledge of uncaused free will choices. It seems to be an unquestionable fact of reality—God never gets these things wrong but we still call the shots.

Rav Saadia's view appears to be that of Rav Yehuda Halevi in the *Kuzari* (5:20) where he discusses the free will problem at length.[6] The core of his answer is the idea of God's foreknowledge not being a determining cause in the way a free will choice takes place. However, he stresses the point that since God's foreknowledge is not the cause of a free will choice, those choices remain absolutely free—meaning that they may happen or they may not happen.

This final point seems to introduce a glaring problem in Rav Saadia's answer. If those choices may or may not take place, what really is God's foreknowledge? Is it nothing more than a good guess that may prove wrong? If that is the case, then in what sense can we assert that God really has foreknowledge? This appears to be the first of a series of Jewish answers that dislodge the question by eliminating one side or the other of the original problem. Some would eliminate foreknowledge while others would eliminate free will, but the solution to the problem is only found by denial of a cardinal principle of Jewish theology.

Indeed, this is the problem raised in the *Sefer Ha-ikarim* by the early 15th-century philosopher Joseph Albo (4:1).[7] After bringing Rav Saadia's answer and placing the *Kuzari* squarely in that camp, he then rejects that answer because God's knowledge "would not be knowledge but foolishness."[8] Rav Albo then goes on to reject the opposite opinion—that God's foreknowledge must be absolute and free will is an illusion. His ultimate

---

6 וכבר האריכו בזה המדברים, ויצא להם כי המדע בו במקרה, ואין ידיעת הדבר סבה להיותו, ולא תכריח ידיעת האלהים בהוות, והם עם זה באפשר שיהיו ושלא יהיו, כי אין הידיעה במה שיהיה היא הסבה בהיותו, כאשר הידיעה במה שהיה איננה סבה להיותו, אך ראיה עליו.

7 ואין זה מספיק לפי שהדברים הללו קרובים לדברי האומרים שאין השם יתברך יודע הדברים האפשריים, שאם היה יודע אותם אחר שאין מציאותם תלוי בידיעתו כבר היה אפשר שתהיה ידיעתו בחלוף היוצא אל המציאות מב' חלקי האפשר, ולא תהיה אם כן ידיעה אלא סכלות.

8 Rav David Cohen, better known as the "Nazir," a student/colleague of the first Rav Kook, compiled an edition of *Emunot v-Deot* with his own notes on the text. In this section he strongly disagrees with Rav Albo's reading of Rav Saadia. He argues that equating Rav Saadia with the *Kuzari* is not correct and that this is what induced Rav Albo to reject Rav Saadia's answer. Instead, he claims that Rav Saadia actually means something else entirely—that free will choices are an aspect of God's continuous act of creation. They are our contribution to creation. It is not entirely clear how this profound idea fits into Rav Saadia's words.

solution is to quote the next, and unquestionably the most famous answer to the question, the highly debatable solution of Maimonides.

Maimonides: The Second Answer

Almost anybody who approaches this question from a Jewish perspective begins with Rambam. He stated the question in its classic format and he answered it in the manner that has since become the classic solution. The only problem with his approach is that he doesn't appear to answer the question. In fact, after spelling out the question he seems to go out of his way to avoid answering it. The following is a fairly faithful translation of his "answer":

> We have already explained in the second chapter of the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah that the Holy One does not know with knowledge that is outside of Him as do human beings whose knowledge is distinct from themselves, rather God and His knowledge are one. The human mind is unable to fully grasp this matter. Just as human beings lack the ability to attain an understanding of the reality of the Creator, as it says, "For man cannot see Me and live," so they cannot fully grasp the mind of the Creator. This is what the prophet spoke, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not My ways." Since this is so, we lack the ability to know how the Holy One knows all of creation and their actions, but we do know without any doubt that the deeds of a person are in the hands of that person and the Holy One does not sway him or decree upon him to act.[9]

While it sounds impressive at first with its Biblical quotes and profound theology, when the dust clears not only is it unclear what his answer is, it is not even clear that he attempted to answer it. The bottom line seems to be that there is an answer but we cannot fully grasp it. The key to the "answer that we cannot understand" is this distinction between God's mind and the human mind. And the key to that distinction is the unfathomable idea that "God and his knowledge are one," as opposed to human beings "whose knowledge is distinct from themselves." If we

---

[9] כבר בארנו בפ' שני מהלכות יסודי התורה שהקב"ה אינו יודע מדיעה שהיא חוץ ממנו כבני אדם שהם ודעתם שנים, אלא הוא יתעלה שמו ודעתו אחד ואין דעתו של אדם יכולה להשיג דבר זה על בוריו וכשם שאין כח באדם להשיג ולמצוא אמתת הבורא שנאמר כי לא יראני האדם וחי אין כח באדם להשיג ולמצוא דעתו של בורא, הוא שהנביא אמר כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי, וכיון שכן הוא אין בנו כח לידע היאך ידע הקדוש ברוך הוא כל הברואים והמעשים אבל נדע בלא ספק שמעשה האדם ביד האדם ואין הקדוש ברוך הוא מושכו ולא גוזר עליו לעשות כך.

could understand what that means, perhaps we would have a better idea of what Rambam was driving at.

The one real clue he gave is to look in that earlier section of the *Mishneh Torah*. In that section (*Foundations of the Torah* 2:10) he describes God's self-knowledge and emphasizes the point that God's knowledge is not something distinct from God's essence, nor is any other aspect of God distinct from God's essence. God is the ultimate in oneness—oneness to a degree that cannot be fathomed by anything other than God. His concluding statement to this oneness is: "It emerges that He is the Knower, the known, and the knowledge itself—it is all one." This far-reaching statement is clarified in the *Moreh Nevukhim* (1:68) in a chapter devoted to this idea.[10] There, somewhat surprisingly, he states that the human mind can experience the idea of the oneness of the knower, the known, and the knowledge through the creative process of abstract thought. This is one of the ways in which the human mind resembles God. The difference between them, which is an infinite gap, is that with us it is an ability that we can use when we choose but it lies dormant at all other times, while with God it is a constant state of being. Another difference, which Rambam stresses several times in his works, including our selection from the *Mishneh Torah*, is that the things that we create through intellectual conception are not really "us," they are forms that are outside of us. With God there is no "outside" and "inside." It is all God.

While this is all very profound, does it help us answer the problem? Rambam is extremely clear that free will is beyond doubt. He is equally clear that God has to have complete knowledge of all things and cannot be said to acquire new knowledge with time. As he states in *Moreh Nevukhim* (3:20, Friedlander translation):

> His knowledge does not change like ours when the objects of His knowledge change. Similarly, we say that the various events are known to Him before they take place. He constantly knows them, and therefore no fresh knowledge is acquired by Him. E.g., He knows that a certain person is non-existent at present, will come to existence at a certain time, will continue to exist for some time, and will then cease to exist. When this person, in accordance with God's foreknowledge concerning him, comes into existence God's

[10] The origins of this profound statement are somewhat vague. Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote it in his commentary to the Torah (Exodus 34:6), which predated Rambam by about 50 years. It is virtually beyond question that Rambam was familiar with this commentary. Rambam himself attributed the idea to Aristotle (presumably Metaphysics 12:9), but the exact idea is difficult to find there. Others trace it to the 4th- century neo-Platonist Plotinus or his later Christian contemporary, Augustine, though again, the exact statement is nowhere to be found.

> knowledge is not increased; it contains nothing that it did not contain before, but something has taken place that was known previously exactly as it has taken place.

It appears that Rambam feels that there is indeed an answer to this question but that it cannot be understood by the human mind. "We lack the ability to know how the Holy One knows all of creation and their actions." This seems to be the final word from Rambam—there is an answer but we cannot fathom it.[11] This is certainly how the *Sefer Ha-ikarim* (4:3) understood Rambam in summing up the free will-divine foreknowledge problem by equating Rambam with the Mishna in *Avot* and concluding with the words, "This is the truth in this investigation, even though our intelligence is not sufficient to grasp how this is possible" (that God knows everything with no limitations and yet we have free will).

Rambam's most important critic, Ravad, also understood that no real answer was being presented here. His typically harsh response to Rambam's handling of the matter states: "This author has not acted in the ways of the sages. A person should not begin a matter if he does not know how to complete it. He began with asking questions and left the matter unanswered and left it to faith. It would have been better if he had left the matter in innocent ignorance and not aroused people's hearts and left their minds in doubt, because perhaps a time will come when they wonder about this."[12]

Whether Ravad is correct about not asking questions if one doesn't know the answer is a matter of opinion. Clearly Rambam either didn't agree or he felt that whatever he provided for an answer was sufficient to put the problem to rest. In any case, Ravad himself continues his commentary on this question and provides his own version of what he considers to be an insufficient answer.

---

11 It should be noted that the 16th-century commentary to *Avot* by Rav Moshe Almosnino applies the "beyond time" answer of Boethius to Rambam. While there may be some truth to this approach and it is certainly not unusual for those trying to understand Rambam to think along these lines, it is difficult to fit it into Rambam's words in *Mishneh Torah*. Why didn't he simply state this rather straightforward idea instead of leaving everything vague? Furthermore, as stated earlier in this essay, this approach doesn't answer the question; it merely restates the notion of God's foreknowledge.

12 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.

Ravad: The Third Answer

If one takes Ravad at his word, he is dealing with a question he would rather never have been asked but once it has been brought to the fore, it has to be answered. He gives what he admits is an unsatisfactory answer, a phenomenon that is rather unusual in Judaism. Both at the beginning and the end of his answer he stresses that the answer leaves something to be desired:

> Even though the answer is not problem-free it is better to have a partial answer. If the good or evil of man was dependent on a divine decree, we would be forced to say that God's foreknowledge is deterministic and the question would be extremely difficult. Now that the Creator took control (of free will choices) out of His own hands and handed it to human beings, God's foreknowledge (of free will choices) is not a decree. Rather, it is like the foreknowledge of the astrologers who know from an outside source what will happen. It is known that anything that happens to man, big or small, the Creator handed over to the power of the stars, but He gave man the intelligence to extricate himself from this power. This is the ability given to man to be either good or evil. The Creator knows the strength of the stars and their appointed times, and if the intelligence of man can extricate him from this power or not. This foreknowledge (of God) is not a decree. But all this is not enough.[13]

We are immediately faced with the fact that there are problems with the answer. But before dealing with the problems, we must understand his answer. He clearly is not willing to relinquish free will, so his solution is to make God's foreknowledge non-deterministic, similar to Rav Saadia and the *Kuzari*. However, unlike them, he provides a mechanism for how this could be. He makes God's foreknowledge comparable to the predictive abilities of astrologers,[14] who look upon things from outside. This

---

[13] ואף על פי שאין תשובה נצחת על זה טוב הוא לסמוך לו קצת תשובה ואומר, אם היו צדקת האדם ורשעתו תלוים 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 שיודעים מכח אחר מה יהיו דרכיו של זה והדבר ידוע שכל מקרה האדם קטן וגדול מסרו הבורא בכח המזלות אלא שנתן בו השכל להיותו מחזיקו לצאת מתחת המזל והוא הכח הנתון באדם להיותו טוב או רע והבורא יודע כח המזל ורגעיו אם יש כח בשכל להוציאו לזה מידו אם לא וזו הידיעה אינה גזירה, וכל זה איננו שוה.

[14] It must be remembered that in the time of Ravad astrological control of fate was widely considered to be a solid fact and not a matter of superstition. Rambam, who rejected it, was the exception, not the rule. To fit Ravad's scheme into today's standards we must substitute the laws of nature in place of the power of

predictive ability is dependent on the relative strengths of outside forces versus the inner willpower of a human being. Although God's knowledge encompasses both of these, that knowledge does not decree what choice a person will make.

The reason for this, however, is not entirely clear. It appears to be because the final choices of whether to use the power of the will is still unknown until the moment of decision. But this is really tantamount to saying that God does not know, precisely the problem the *Sefer Ha-ikarim* had with the Rav Saadia/*Kuzari* approach. Alternatively, he could mean that although astrological predictive power is infallible, it is still not the same as a divine decree. It only "knows" things from "outside," meaning that it just happens to be that way. According to this understanding, Ravad means that a combination of outside forces and inner strengths and weaknesses determine the outcome of human choices. There is no ultimate free will, but there is the somewhat illusory ability to think that one is choosing, since our innate abilities play such a major role in determining what we do. Perhaps the shortcomings of either approach forced Ravad to admit that his answer was not sufficient.

Of the few subsequent Jewish thinkers who wrote about Ravad's answer, probably the most significant is the 15th-century Rivash (Rav Yitzchak ben Sheshet) who wrote a short responsum (118) on our question and proposed three possible answers. The second answer is that of Ravad, which he takes to mean that man ultimately does not have free will, and because of this, he rejects the answer. His final answer, which he believes to be correct, is clearly the "middle knowledge" answer that God knows what we will do but we do it with complete freedom from any decree or determinism. God simply knows it will happen through free will. In all likelihood, he considered this to be Rav Saadia's answer and very possibly Rambam's also, though he does not mention either of them. The responsum begins with what is perhaps the most radical answer of them all. It is that of Ralbag.

Ralbag: The Fourth Answer

This is by far the simplest of the answers. It requires no philosophical leaps and is extremely easy to understand. The creator of this approach, Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, was a 14th-century philosopher known to the non-Jewish world as Gersonides. He represents the epitome of rational

---

the stars. Thus he would be saying that all human affairs are under the control of natural powers, like genetic drives, or social pressure, or atomic forces, or any other power that is perhaps beyond human control.

Jewish philosophy, even more so than his illustrious predecessor, Maimonides. Maimonides was his primary standard of philosophical truth but that does not mean that he would always agree with him. Our question is one of the more famous examples in which he doesn't. While Maimonides refused to break rank with the traditional Jewish notion of divine foreknowledge, even in the face of the contradictory and equally traditional belief in free will, Ralbag had no such qualms.

His answer,[15] in a nutshell, is to dispense with God's foreknowledge, at least as far as matters which he calls "contingent." These are things which are left to the unknown future. Primary among them, of course, are free will choices. God has no foreknowledge of such matters, for if He did, they would be predetermined. God's knowledge of anything concerning the future is only general—that is, God knows what things are likely to happen due to historical patterns, human nature, and a wide variety of other factors. But this knowledge could be proven incorrect, depending on the free choices of human beings. While this may sound very non-traditional for a classic and highly respected Jewish thinker, it is absolutely clear that this was Ralbag's belief. When confronted with the two pillars of traditional Judaism that formed the famous contradiction, Ralbag saw that one had to go. To him it was obvious that free will must remain, so divine foreknowledge had to be jettisoned.

As radical as this sounds, it is the single answer that unquestionably answers the question. The problem, of course, is that he never really solved the contradiction. Any other approach would view this approach as a form of philosophical cheating. To simply eliminate one side of the problem solves nothing. It is reasonable to believe in God as the creator, sustainer, and supervisor of the universe, but negating God's access to the future places God under the fetters of time. How could God, the creator of time, be subject to its limitations? It is true that the future has not happened yet for us, but it seems that God, who creates it, should be privy to what lies in its store. Does it just "happen," without God having to make it happen? What is the mechanism for this non-divine miracle? This was the sacrifice that Ralbag had to make to achieve his answer. Was it worth the price?

A variation of Ralbag's answer can be found in the 18th-century Biblical commentary of the Rav Ḥayyim ben Attar, popularly known as the *Ohr Ha-ḥayyim*. In his commentary to Genesis 6:5, which begins the description of God showing regret over having created man, and leads to the fateful decision of the catastrophic Flood, he attempts to tackle the

---

15 See *Milḥamot Hashem* 3:4 and Ralbag's commentary to Genesis 18: 20–21.

question of God apparently changing His mind. In the course of this matter, he quotes the famous words of Rambam from *Mishneh Torah* that we have already examined. His novel explanation of these words is that God has the ability to remove knowledge from His scope. This is exactly what enables man to have free will. In truth, God's knowledge should encompass these choices, but God elects to hide this knowledge from Himself. Fitting this explanation into the words of Rambam is not easy, but it fits very easily into the words of Ralbag, with the one proviso that rather than this being an inherent restriction on God (Ralbag), it is a choice that God makes to facilitate the essential freedom of the will. When the dust clears, however, God does not know what we are going to choose.

Yitzḥak Luria: The Fifth Answer

Probably the most novel answer of all comes from the writings of Rav Yitzḥak Luria, better known as the Ari, of Kabbalistic Tzefat fame. His answer is found at the end of a scarcely known and virtually never quoted work called *Arbah Meot Shekel Ha-kodesh*. The question and the response have nothing to do with the rest of the book. It seems to have been tacked on by some editor at some point in the Kabbalistic past. The question is stated as having been asked by a Kabbalist named Avraham Monsitz of Tenipil (Ternopil ?), a city in Barbaria (Bavaria ?). The question addressed is not exactly our question but it is essentially the same. The answer is clearly unique and he may not have been working with any of the previous approaches to the question, which puts it into a category by itself.

The gist is that God's infinite knowledge only functions in one of the several spiritual dimensions of the Kabbalistic understanding of reality. Only in *Atzilut*, generally understood as the dimension of "emanation," which is the closest spiritual dimension to God's unfathomable essence, is there true "divine knowledge." In the lower dimensions, beginning with *Beriyah*, or "creation," there is no infinite foreknowledge but only a general awareness of what is and has taken place. In these lower dimensions free will exists and no foreknowledge of God predetermines a free will choice. In *Atzilut*, however, there is no free will and consequently no reward or punishment for human deeds.

This much is clear. What it all means is another story. Clearly, there is a mysterious spiritual disconnect between the dimensional levels of reality. The rules that guide *Atzilut* do not apply to the lower dimensions, and vice versa. How exactly this could be is unclear, since each lower dimension is supposed to "emanate" from the dimension above it. But Kabbalah is loaded with ideas that must be accepted without recourse to Talmudic-style questioning. Somehow, in the transition between *Atzilut* and

Beriyah free will emerged while foreknowledge vanished. The two never cross paths so there is no contradiction between them. It is a particularly ingenious way of answering an extremely difficult problem.

But it has its own problems. Aside from the general problem of how the spiritual dimensions differ in very essential matters, there is the problem of how the question itself is answered. Is there free will or is there not? Is there foreknowledge or is there not? On the ultimate scale of things, meaning through God's infinite eyes, it would seem that there really is no free will. Thus free will is really a non-existent illusion that we are unable to see through. On the other hand, in the reality within which we exist, there is no divine foreknowledge. God may know quite a bit—everything past and present—but the future of non-deterministic free will choices is just as closed to God as it is to us. Isn't this just Ralbag's answer for our reality and the exact opposite in God's reality?

There are no answers to these questions because from the perspective of the Ari, they are not serious questions to begin with. If free will only exists in our reality and not in God's reality, then so be it. If divine foreknowledge only exists on God's level and not on ours, so be it. As far as the question is there *really* free will if on God's level it does not exist, the obvious answer is that we exist on our level and therefore, for us, free will exists. As clever as this answer seems, it is difficult to escape the feeling that it would have been appropriate if he had followed the lead of Ravad and concluded with, "all this is not sufficient."

Review of the Answers

Let us make a quick review of everything we have covered. The following table shows all of the answers we have examined and their possible shortcomings:

Solutions	Possible Shortcomings
1) Atheist: No free will; no foreknowledge.	No moral responsibility; defies human experience.
2) Scientific: Deterministic plus indeterministic causes somehow result in free will.	Whatever "will" there is cannot really be "free" since it is either predetermined or random.
3) Boethius: God works outside of time.	On God's scale there is no free will.
4) Middle knowledge: God knows our choices but they are still free.	How could God really know what does not yet exist?

5) Rav Saadia: God's foreknowledge does not determine our choices.	Why not? If it means that God really does not know, then God has no foreknowledge.
6) Rambam: God's knowledge is not external to God's essence, but we cannot understand this.	How is the question answered at all?
7) Ravad: God knows all the deterministic forces and how much willpower there is to resist.	Either God has no foreknowledge or we have no free will.
8) Ralbag: God only knows what can be known, which does not include the free will future.	God has no foreknowledge concerning free will.
9) Ari: On God's level there is foreknowledge but no free will; on our level there is free will but no foreknowledge.	Ultimately (on God's level), we do not have free will. Practically (on our level) God has no foreknowledge.

It is a little discouraging after all this to realize that there is no completely acceptable answer. If a question has been discussed for 2,000 years somebody should have solved it. On the other hand, perhaps there is no solution. This is one of the great mysteries, so perhaps the human mind is unable to solve it. But what is the human mind if not the image of God in creation? Should it not contain within its great depths the ability to understand the source of its own greatest strength—the unfettered will?

Let us examine the problems listed above and see if we can come to terms with any of them. The atheist problem is that it contradicts experience and leaves no room for moral responsibility. Neither of these problems should trouble a true atheist, who would genuinely believe that there is no ultimate purpose to life and certainly has no qualms about any contradictions with something as fickle as human experience. But is that the route we wish to take? While some people may be perfectly satisfied with no ultimate purpose in life, others are not. Anyone hoping to avoid such a nihilistic fate has to reject this approach.

The second answer tried to avoid the problems with the first answer by the fancy footwork of quantum theory and whatever other clever ideas science sends down the pipeline. Advocates of this answer are certainly satisfied with how it settles the human experience problem and are probably able to convince themselves that it provides enough degrees of freedom to account for moral responsibility. The real problem here is that this is just a sleight of hand; substituting one form of non-freedom (randomness) for another (determinism). Does this really solve the problem?

Middle knowledge remains the royal road to a solution among Christians who are still looking for an answer. The problem with it is rather obscure, although it could just as easily be said that the answer itself is equally obscure. Everything falls into place—God has His foreknowledge and we have our free will. However, the problem remains: isn't this just substituting one unanswerable question for another? We started with a contradiction between two philosophical /theological essentials and we ended with an answer that really says nothing more than "somehow it works."

Rav Saadia gave the first official Jewish answer. It is a Jewish version of middle knowledge which got some future Jewish thinkers wondering if it left us without free will, or God without divine foreknowledge. He was trying to leave both firmly in place but didn't provide any mechanism for explaining how this could be done. In the end it has the same problems as middle knowledge.

Rambam gets credit for admitting that he wasn't trying to pull the wool over our eyes with an answer that didn't answer anything. Perhaps this is the most honest approach—we cannot understand how it works, but it does. Certainly those who live by faith will have no problem with this. However, there is no denying that Rambam students would expect more than this from their ultra-rationalist teacher.

Ravad, if we assume he means that God's knowledge is absolutely perfect and lacks nothing, is essentially disposing with free will. Is this really so terrible from a Jewish perspective? We certainly were created in a manner that leaves us completely convinced that we make free will choices, so our moral responsibility is secure even if on an ultimate level it doesn't really exist. Nobody is truly capable of living on that level so who is to say that it really matters? On the other hand, we are dealing with a pretty ultimate question here, so is a solid illusion of free will enough to answer the question?

Ralbag takes the opposite route, disposing with divine foreknowledge. As we have already seen, this is not such a problem with the Torah itself, nor is it a major stumbling block in everyday life, even a devoutly religious life. In all likelihood, this is the answer that most people would give if faced with an ultimatum. What is really so theologically troubling about giving up divine foreknowledge? Perhaps the fundamental problem is that it leaves God a quantum leap lower than what had always been believed. God just doesn't seem quite so omni-everything if He can't figure out what we're going to do two seconds from now. If God is stuck in the present like we are then how is God infinitely greater than we? Furthermore, how did God create time if He is stuck in time?

The Ari's route answers everything but seems to solve nothing. It eliminates the contradiction without limiting either the moral/ experiential necessity of free will or the theological principle of divine foreknowledge. What more could we ask for? The catch, of course, is that we must buy into this notion of separate dimensions. Even more problematic is that once we accept that, we are stuck with the reality that in neither dimension do both free will and divine foreknowledge simultaneously exist. We still cannot have both in the same world.

Conclusion: Is There an Answer?

So what are we left with? Is there no answer to this perplexing question? There is still one somewhat unexplored route. Up until now we have allowed Rambam to get away with not really answering the question but stating that there is an answer. We allowed Ravad to chide him for this lack of rabbinic protocol. But is this really the case? Maybe he said more than we or Ravad thought he did. He did write that the answer lies in the difference between the way we know things and the way that God does. He even clarified what this difference is—that God's knowledge is not outside of His essence whereas ours is outside of ourselves. He further intimates that this state of mind, which exists permanently within God and only occasionally within us, is somehow expressed in the profound idea that God is the "knower, the known, and knowledge itself."

Rambam also wrote in *Moreh Nevukhim* that we share this divine quality when we create something through abstract thought. The object of such thought and the thought process itself exists within us, not outside of us. When we cease to think about it, it all ceases to exist. For those moments of mental bliss, we are the knower, the known, and knowledge itself. Perhaps these clues can point us in the right direction. Perhaps we have to look into our own minds to get a glimpse of how God's mind works. We understand intuitively that we are "knowers," that our minds contemplate and use "knowledge itself," and that within our minds we have things that are "known." Maybe if we truly understood how all this works in our own minds we would gain a better understanding of how it could work with God.[16]

Is this a possible path to finally answer the famous question? Or does it merely leave us in another state of ignorance? The greatest minds of Judaism struggled with this classic theological question over the millennia and were only able to answer it by either eliminating one side or the other

---

[16] The author would be interested in hearing from others who have pondered the free will question and who might have another possible solution. Please feel free to address any ideas to the author at gsmeyer3@gmail.com.

or by recognizing that we cannot ever truly understand how both sides can exist simultaneously or by proposing solutions that only shifted things to another question. At the very least, perhaps, we can suggest that Judaism has elevated the free will process to something approaching the scale of the divine. It makes the choices of right or wrong become nothing less than an opportunity to fill in certain blanks in God's great plan. Those pure and holy choices are, to some infinitesimal degree, the thinking of God's thoughts. It is only in those rare moments of super-consciousness that we truly experience and use this miraculous and mysterious power. From where does it come? What great source are we tapping into in our blissful ignorance of the profound significance of our own part in creation? ☙