

Free Will Against Gravity

Or Why There Is No Shortcut on the Never-Ending Path to the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Nature often restrains free will. No matter how high I jump, the Earth's gravitation pull brings me down. But with Newton's laws from the 17th century and technology from the 20th, NASA landed astronauts on the Moon. In 300 years of progress, free will overcame gravity.

In Bereshit, Adam with Hava ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil of their own will. But they got a tornado of wrath and only a twinkle of Knowledge. G-d expelled both from the Garden of Eden, condemned Hava to severe childbirth and Adam to hard labor. In no time, the Tree had beaten free will.

Where does the Torah mention free will? Jewish Sages point to Bereshit 1.26 where G-d said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." The omnipotent G-d created the world as He willed and declared it "Very Good." He gave people immortal souls, creative intellect, and free will to discern Good from Evil. The choice, however, is not fully free or random. It should end up on the side of Good following the Torah's divine commandments. Now, are there dangers from veering off the Torah route?

Bereshit shows that using free will is seldom a straight path. Good aims that reject Torah can pave the road to wrong decisions. Hava defied G-d when a 'good' desire to know Good and Evil fogged her judgment. Free will can drive a man to Evil due to fear and ignorance, as when Adam blamed Hava for feeding him the forbidden fruit. Terrible choices happen out of envy, as when Cain killed Havel. Yet the worst occurs when one's free will succumbs to a mob. Then, the soul cuts its tie with G-d and drowns in the mire of Evil: "And the Lord saw that the evil of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of his heart was only evil all the time."

Most bad choices are irreversible. All but Ark dwellers perished in Flood and lost is the road to Paradise. Though it is never too late to repent, as Hava exclaimed after Cain's birth, "I have acquired a man with the Lord."

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob always chose Good when they founded the Jewish Nation. But most people keep swinging between Good and Evil, while committed evildoers are bound to sin. Our Creator knows how hard it is for a human of a body and soul to make the right choices in the Material World, which intricacy is beyond one's grasp. Therefore, He mercifully gave us the Torah, which leads the free will to Good. Because Torah is a Guide to Life in an unbelievably complex world, its wisdom is boundless. One can never claim to have learned all nuances of the Written and Oral Law. *Still, is it likely to find a shortcut that is better than the 'tree diet'?*

In the past, all such tries in Jewish history failed disastrously. More than 2,700 years ago, in Israel and Judah, Shmita laws were scorned, and idolatry replaced trust in G-d. That caused razing of the First Temple, the end of the kingdom of Israel, exile to Babylon, and the loss of 10 tribes. Later, sects assaulted the unity of the Jewish faith. Their mutual hatred furthered the Second Temple's destruction and desolation of the Promised Land. Then, in 1917 Russia, some Jews dropped Torah and clung to Communism. But the workers' Paradise was a prison for all peoples, where Soviet Jewry suffered brutal anti-Semitic oppression until the fall of the USSR.

Today, as always, some simplify beliefs by adapting Torah to current science. Yet scientific dogmas mutate and often crumble when they ascend the endless spiral of progress. However, Torah stays unmoved, given by G-d, who does not change. Others put Torah aside, preferring to drift along with benign and fashionable societal trends of their day. But the secular currents crush in violent swirls as they clash and break away, inevitably sinking whole cultures into the abyss of history.

What if in the future they implant into the brains a cloud-linked microchip, forcing all to Good? That would be ultimate slavery. The 'good' chip will displace Torah with virtual idolatry. It will squash freedom and turn us into pliant drones of cloud masters, while the predestined bugs in its design will fuel standing waves of mass psychosis. Undoubtedly, the effects of a 'good' pill or 'anti-evil' vaccine would be no less horrific.

And so, one infers that the only way to the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the G-d given Torah path. By launching rockets, the modern civilization's free will employs the laws of Nature to expand its presence in a local neighborhood of the known Universe. At the same time, during a lifelong study of the timeless Torah, one's free will inspires creative insights into Evil's bottomless depths and Good's infinite heights.