

# TO ASK OR NOT TO ASK?

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT QUESTIONS IN HASHKAFAT

### MIZRACHI UK'S WEEKEND OF INSPIRATION - MAY 2022

1. והיסוד העשירי שהוא יתעלה יודע מעשי בני אדם ואינו מזניחם, ולא כדעת מי שאמר (יחזקאל ח"ב) עֲזַב ה' אֶת הָאָרֶץ, אלא כמו שאמר (ירמיהו ל"ב) גָּדַל הַעֲצָה וְרַב הַעֲלִילָה אֲשֶׁר עֲיִינֶיךָ פְּקָחוֹת עַל כָּל דְּרָכֵי בְנֵי אָדָם, ואמר (בראשית ו"ה) וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי רָבָה רָעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ, ואמר (בראשית י"ז) זָעַקְתָּ סֹדִים וְעַמְּךָ כִּי רָבָה. וזה יורה על זה היסוד העשירי

רמב"ם - הקדמה לפ' חלק, משנה סנהדרין

• **The moral dilemma:** If God knows what I am about to do, how can I have free choice to do it? And if I have no freedom of choice, how can I be held accountable for my actions?

2. הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה .....

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה טו

*The compatibility of Omniscience and Free Will is assumed in Pirkei Avot - 'all is foreseen yet free will is given'.*

3. שְׁמָא תֵּאמְרוּ וְהֲלוֹא הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יוֹדֵעַ כָּל מַה שְׂיִהְיֶה קֹדֶם שְׂיִהְיֶה: יָדַע שְׂזָה צְדִיק אוֹ רָשָׁע, אוֹ לֹא יָדַע; אִם יָדַע שֶׁהוּא יִהְיֶה צְדִיק, אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה צְדִיק, וְאִם תֵּאמְרוּ שֶׁיָּדַע שְׂיִהְיֶה צְדִיק וְאֶפְשָׁר שְׂיִהְיֶה רָשָׁע, הֲרִי לֹא יָדַע הַדָּבָר עַל בְּרִיּוֹ. יָדַע שֶׁתְּשׁוּבַת שְׂאֵלָה זוֹ "אֲרַכָּה מֵאָרֶץ, מִדָּה; וְרַחֲבָה, מִנִּי-יָם" (איוב י"ט), וְכַמּוֹ עֵינִיקָרִים גְּדוּלִים וְהַרְרִים רַמִּים תְּלוּיִים בָּהּ; אֲבָל צְרִיף אֲתָה לִידַע וְלִהְיוֹת בְּדָבָר זֶה שְׂאֵנִי אוֹמֵר. כִּבְר בְּאָרְנֵנוּ בְּפִרְק שְׁנֵי מֵהַלְכוֹת יְסוּדֵי הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ בְּדַעַה שֶׁהִיא חוּץ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּבְנֵי אָדָם שֶׁהוּן וְדַעְתָּם שְׁנִים, אֲלֵא הוּא יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמוֹ וְדַעְתּוֹ אַחַד; וְאֵין דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁלְאָדָם יְכוּלָה לְהַשִּׁיג דָּבָר זֶה עַל בְּרִיּוֹ. וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁאֵין כּוֹחַ בְּאָדָם לְהַשִּׁיג וְלִמְצָא אֲמִתּוֹת הַבוֹרָא, שְׂנֵאָמַר "כִּי לֹא-יֵרָאֵנִי הָאָדָם, וְחִי" (שמות לג,ב) -- כִּי אֵין כּוֹחַ בְּאָדָם לְהַשִּׁיג וְלִמְצָא דַּעְתּוֹ שֶׁלְבוֹרָא: הוּא שֶׁהִנְבִּיא אוֹמֵר "כִּי לֹא מִחֲשְׁבוֹתַי מִחֲשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם, וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דְּרָכָי" (ישעיהו נה,ח). וְכִינֵן שֶׁכֵּן הוּא, אֵין בְּנוֹ כּוֹחַ לִידַע הַיָּאָד יָדַע הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כָּל הַבְּרוּאִים וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם. אֲבָל יָדַע בְּלֹא סִפְקָ, שֶׁמַּעֲשֵׂה הָאָדָם בְּיַד הָאָדָם; וְאֵין הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹשִׁכוֹ, וְלֹא גּוֹזֵר עָלָיו לֹא לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן וְלֹא לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן. וְלֹא מִפְּנֵי קִבְלַת הַדָּת בְּלִבָּד יָדַע דָּבָר זֶה, אֲלֵא בְּרֵאוֹת בְּרוּרוֹת מִדְּבַרֵי הַחֲכָמָה. וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה נֵאמַר בְּנְבוּאָה שְׂדֵנִין אֶת הָאָדָם עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו כִּפִּי מַעֲשָׂיו, אִם טוֹב וְאִם רָע. וְזֶה הַעִיָּקָר, שֶׁכָּל דְּבַרֵי הַנְּבוּאָה תְּלוּיִין בּוֹ

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ה

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 still 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 (Shemot 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.

*In Hilchot Teshuva the Rambam deals with the moral question of free will vs Omniscience as follows: (i) the resolution to the problem cannot be understood by us; (ii) this is because our assumptions as to God's Knowledge are all wrong. Since God has no separate knowledge of something outside of Himself but rather this Knowledge is an expression of His Essence, it remains ultimately unknowable.*

What we CAN know (as with all aspects of Negative Theology) is what God's Knowledge is NOT. It is NOT a specific knowledge of an action before it happens (God's Knowledge is in any event beyond time) and thus the philosophical tension is also reduced.

4. ... נמצאת אתה אומר הוא הידוע והוא הידוע והוא הדעה עצמה הכל אחד. ודבר זה אין כח בפה לאמרו ולא באזן לשמעו ולא בלב האדם להכירו על בריו. ... ולפיכך אינו מכיר הברואים וידועם מחמת הברואים כמו שאנו יודעים אותם אלא מחמת עצמו ידועם. לפיכך מפני שהוא ידוע עצמו ידוע הכל שיהכל נסמך לו בהיותו:

רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ב הלכה י

*God's knowledge is of Himself. Since all existence is subsumed within His own reality, that knowledge of Himself constitutes complete knowledge of everything.*

5. וכיון שכן הוא אין בנו כח לידע היאך ידע הקב"ה כל הברואים ומעשה ידיהם. א"א לא נהג זה המתבר 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 שידעתו היא גזירתו והיתה לנו השאלה קשה מאד. ועכשיו שהבורא הסיר זו הממשלה מידו ומסרה ביד האדם עצמו אין ידיעתו גזירה אבל היא כידעת 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 שורה.

השגת הראב"ד הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ה

Accordingly, we do not have the potential to conceive how The Holy One, blessed be He, knows all the creations and their deeds - Ravad: this writer did not act the way intelligent writers should! For a person should never start something if he does not know how to complete it! Yet he opened with difficult questions and then left the matter unresolved and told [the reader] to trust him. It would have been better for him to have left the matter to people in their innocence, rather than building them up and then leaving them in doubt. What if they start to doubt other things in their minds!!? And even though I do not have a full answer to this, it may be helpful to give a partial answer as follows. If the good or wicked deeds of a person were dependent on the decree of the Creator, we would say that His knowledge was [equivalent to] His decree, and we would indeed have a very difficult problem. But now that the Creator has withdrawn His control [over free choice] and handed this to man, His foreknowledge is not a decree but is rather like the knowledge of the astrologers who gain knowledge of the likely actions of this person from an external source (since it is well known that everything that happens to a person, whether small or large, has been given over by the Creator to the power of the Constellations. But He has given [the person] the understanding to strengthen himself and to move out of this Mazal, being the power vested in all people to choose good or bad. And the Creator knows the strength of the Mazal and also whether the person has the mental strength to escape from it or not, and this [Divine] knowledge is not a decree. Yet this [answer] is also [ultimately] worthless!

*The Ravad is deeply unhappy with the Rambam's answer, which he understands to be evading the question. The Rambam has ultimately given a philosophical answer which deals more with the philosophical question. The real moral question remains - is God really forcing me to do what I actually think I am choosing. The Ra'avad's answer is that God is certainly not decreeing the specific actions of Man and does not have determinate knowledge of Man's choices. Man's actions are circumscribed by the limitations imposed by Mazal which direct a person's life in significant ways. God has total knowledge of the forces of Mazal. Man has the intellect to be able to break out of this Mazal, each person according to the extent of his or her intellectual strength. Since God also knows the exact parameters of that strength, this, together with his perfect knowledge of the Mazal, gives God all the parameters needed to know what choices will be made without causing them.*

This is often called 'soft determinism' - God knows us so well that he can predict with total accuracy what will happen to us and what we will choose. Nevertheless, that Knowledge in no way coerces us to make the choice.

But does it answer the question? God's Knowledge must be absolutely true. Thus, if God has Knowledge (even without causation) that I will do x, then there can be no other possible outcome. Whilst the Ra'avad does try to deal with causal determinism, there still remains a logical or theological determinism which limits my real ability to choose.

Even according to the Ravad, although I cannot possibly understand God's Knowledge and thus there may well be no causal link to my choices, nevertheless the mere truth of God's knowledge effectively removes my freedom of choice!

The underlying dispute here is not actually about philosophy, but the more basic educational question - when there are difficult questions in Jewish thought or hashkafa which may trouble some people, should we raise the questions even if people may not be happy with the answers, or is it better to avoid the questions (at least for now) and keep people happier.