

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

Ba'al Shem Tov

MEZHIBUZH · BA'AL SHEM TOV, BERESHIT

Divine will (ratzon), unlike human will, is primordial and eternal, so the world's creation at a particular time reflects no change in God but the precise unfolding of what He always willed, even though His knowledge (yedi'ah) of the good deed existed beforehand — teaching that will can stand opposed to and override knowledge. This same principle resolves the tension between G-d's foreknowledge and human free choice: though Hashem knows in advance how a person will act, His will is that we improve our deeds, and since will overrides knowledge, a person remains free to follow the Divine will through Torah and mitzvot (commandments) rather than be bound by the foreknown outcome, making this world one of nisayon (trial) for the tzaddik (righteous person). AI SUMMARY

"In the beginning God created, etc." To resolve the difficulty that all the early sages, of blessed memory, raised: why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not create the world before this time, since action is always better than absence of action — why did His will, may He be blessed, change from not-willing to willing at the time He created, and not before this, seeing that He, may He be blessed, is not subject to change, as it is written (Malachi 3:6), "I, the Lord, have not changed"?

The resolution of this matter is that He, may His Name be blessed, is not comparable to a flesh-and-blood worker. For a flesh-and-blood worker, the wisdom that he has now he did not have before — his wisdom is acquired, and he is also possessed of lack. By way of parable: because he needs a place to dwell in, therefore when he acquires the wisdom to build himself a house, he then builds himself a house.

But He, may His Name be blessed, His wisdom is essential and not acquired, and He is also not possessed of any lack. Therefore, this will that arose in His will to create the world was not a will newly arising in Him at the time of the creation of the world; rather, just as He, may His Name be blessed, is primordial (kadmon), so too His will is primordial.

And from eternity past it was immediately His will to create the world at this particular time when He created it, and not before. Therefore, when the world was created, it was created precisely in its proper time and season, just as it had been His primordial will to create it specifically at this time.

And if so, indeed there was no change of will in Him at all.

And the proof of this is that the world that will be in the future to come, a world that is entirely Shabbat, the tzaddikim (righteous ones) sit with their crowns upon their heads (Berachot 17a), and "the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day" — certainly its level is greater than the level of the world as it is now, and such a good deed is certainly also better than its absence.

So why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not bring it earlier? Because all this must come precisely in its proper time and season, just as the way of Shabbat is to come specifically after the six days of the week. So it is with the matter of the creation of the world: although the Blessed Name knew that the good deed was better than its absence, nevertheless His blessed will stood in opposition to His knowledge. For from before this, just as His knowledge was that the deed was good, so too was His will immediately that the

deed not be done immediately, until the time should come. Therefore He set aside the knowledge and followed after the will.

And before the creation there was, by way of illustration, a world that was entirely Shabbat. And this is what the verse states (Kohelet 3:11): "He has made everything beautiful in its time" — including the world itself. And this is a deep secret, and the one who understands will grasp it.

This itself is the explanation of the matter of foreknowledge and the free choice that remains to man, so that it should not be difficult [to understand] how reward is fitting for the tzaddik (righteous person) and punishment for the rasha (wicked person): behold, "G-d knows" and there is knowledge in the Most High, and He foresaw and gazed to the end of all generations, and knew from the outset that this one would be a tzaddik — and if so, he is compelled to be a tzaddik, and reward could not rightly apply to him; and He likewise knew that this one would be a rasha, and punishment could not rightly apply to him, since he could not have changed His knowledge, may His Name be blessed.

But this is not so, for although He, may His Name be blessed, has knowledge (yedi'ah) [of what will occur], nevertheless His will (ratzon) is that they should improve their deeds. For this reason He gave

us the whole Torah and the mitzvot (commandments), that we should do His will, may He be blessed.

If so, then His will stands opposed to the knowledge that preceded it in thought. Therefore a person is able to be drawn after the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, and not after the knowledge — so that the will overrides the knowledge, since the Holy One, blessed be He, has no desire for this knowledge or for this deed; rather, the knowledge came about against His will. And if a person wishes, he can improve his deeds in accordance with the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, and not draw down and bring upon himself the knowledge [of evil].

For the knowledge of evil was created as a nisayon (trial) for the tzaddikim (righteous ones), as it is written (in Parashat Re'eh): "For Hashem your G-d is testing you" — for this world is a world of trial, in that the soul was sent to be tried in this world: if a person commits the sin, he inclines after the knowledge; and if he does not commit the sin, he inclines after the will and the command, which stands opposed to the knowledge.

Concerning this it is said (in Parashat Vayikra): "An offering, a pleasing aroma to Hashem" — meaning it is a satisfaction before Me that I spoke and My will was done. Understand this well. (Keter Shem Tov, Part II, p. 13, column 3.)

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)