

PART 17: CHAPTER 4, INTRODUCTION

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

In this chapter the debate between *Iyov* and his friends begins. The opening remarks belong to *Elifaz the Teimani*. *Rashi*, based on the interpretation of our sages, explains that *Elifaz* was the son of *Eisav*.

Accordingly, *Elifaz* was a grandson of our patriarch Issac. *Rashi* continues to explain that *Elifaz* was raised in the house of Issac and without a doubt acquired great levels of wisdom from him. It is important for us to know that *Elifaz* was qualified to discuss theological matters with *Iyov* and therefore *Rashi* brings this to our attention. *Elifaz's* represents a school of thought that views man as a creature who possesses absolute freewill.

Man's destiny can be controlled and determined by acts of freewill. This is a sharp contrast to *Iyov's* position that man is a victim of the forces that determine fate and that he does not have the capacity to influence these forces.

The *Malbim* points out that although *Elifaz* declares man to be an agent of freewill we cannot take this to mean that freewill is effective in all human endeavors. Everyone is familiar with the phenomenon that conscious choices do not always produce the anticipated or desired results.

One famous example of this can be found in the Bible story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph had a few dreams that he interpreted in a way that was very disturbing to his brothers. They decided that Joseph had delusions of grandeur and of dominating the fledgling Jewish tribe that was the predecessor of the great Jewish nation. They viewed this as a mortal danger to family unity and ultimately to the entire Jewish nation. Consequently they decided to do away with him and so Joseph was sold into slavery eventually arriving in Egypt.

The Egyptians were infamous for their slave driving and trading. They developed a system that made it virtually impossible for a slave to escape. Joseph suffered the worst possible experience. Not only was he a slave in the most oppressive regime of the ancient world, but was also incarcerated in the Egyptian prisons. These oppressive facilities were not exactly what we could call 'corrective institutions.'

So Joseph was put away in a distant land where he was prevented from exercising his freewill. In such circumstances he would certainly not be able to reign over his brothers.

The end of the story is well known. Joseph becomes the ruler of all of Egypt. Finally, from his new position of power and influence he was able to govern over his entire family. This incredulous course

of events would have been impossible had it not been for Joseph's brothers' decision to eliminate him. This story vividly conveys the message that our decisions and actions may not always achieve the desired results. While Joseph's brothers thought that they were doing G-d's will by eliminating Joseph G-d was 'pulling the strings' to facilitate the fulfillment of his controversial dreams.

There are areas of human activity where freewill does not play a significant role and may even be suspended in order to bring about important events. We can understand that at times G-d chooses to interfere with freewill decisions to facilitate events that are an essential part of His universal plans.

But here we are dealing with decisions and actions that were intended to eliminate Joseph because in his brothers' eyes he posed a danger to the fledgling Jewish nation. In the end those very same decisions and actions paved the way for Joseph to rule over and support for the nation.

G-d's will, as revealed in Joseph's dreams, was to make Joseph the king of the young Jewish nation and be their benevolent provider. The startling reversal of his brothers' scheme demonstrates that no thoughts or actions are beyond the realm of G-d's scrutiny and control. Even acts of militant opposition are manipulated to weave the historical tapestry that reveals G-d's presence and dominion over human events.

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