

EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 8:4

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Understand that freedom of choice can be both invigorating and debilitating, it's that potent. After all, it implies that you're to make your own decisions, and that you alone are accountable for what you do. So even after realizing that most of the options open to us in life are ours to follow through on or not, many of us simply don't "connect the dots." Let's see how Rambam expands upon it.

"People often mistakenly believe" he says "that a person is compelled to do certain things that are actually open to choice". Many suppose, he offers, that a person is destined to marry a particular person, to be a thief, or the like, "But that's erroneous" he says. Since contrary to popular opinion, marriages *aren't* made in Heaven, and no one is *destined* to be a thief or anything of the sort.

After all, it's a mitzvah to marry and a mitzvah to be honest, he points out. And since "G-d doesn't compel you to observe mitzvot" or not, it follows that we alone choose whom we'll marry or how honest we'll be.

(We grant you that many people are especially attracted to each other because they have the same tastes, run in the same circles, are about the same age, etc. But the point is that there are quite a number of people in those categories as well, so no one is sure to marry any one of that type. And while it might also be argued that certain people are craftier, shrewder, have more "street smarts" than others and the like, so they're more likely to take advantage of others' money, it's nonetheless true that no one is *impelled* to either commit or be a victim of a crime.)

So Rambam reiterates that "our actions are in our own hands" and we're not impelled to do or not do anything. In fact, the Talmudic statement cited before that "everything is in the hands of Heaven but the fear of Heaven" which seems to deny free will actually reinforces Rambam's arguments for it. Let's see how.

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