



DOES G-D CHANGE HIS MIND?

An eye-opening exploration of free choice, reward and punishment, and the power of humans to change G-d's mind.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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After G-d reveals Himself to Abraham, he makes a covenant with him and tells him that his descendants will be enslaved in a foreign land (Source 1). The Jewish people go to Egypt (Source 2), and, after years of enslavement, G-d decides that the time has come to redeem them (Source 3). G-d sends Moses to speak with Pharaoh and warn him that He will punish the Egyptians for what they did to the Jews (Source 4).

B. Free Choice.....7

Maimonides teaches that G-d doesn't predetermine who will be righteous or wicked, rather each person has the freedom to choose between good and evil. His reasoning is that were G-d to preordain human conduct it would be unfair to reward goodness and punish evil (Source 5).

The obvious question is, if so, why were the Egyptians punished? It was by Divine design that the Jews were enslaved! Maimonides explains that G-d had only decreed that the Egyptian nation as a collective would enslave the Jews, but the individual Egyptian had the choice not to be a part of it. However, notes Raavad, if each individual would have personally chosen against slavery, G-d's edict wouldn't have been carried out! Therefore, some Egyptians were required to enslave the Jews, so why are they being punished?

Driving Raavad's question home, the Rebbe adds even if individuals would have been able to resist the decree, Pharaoh himself certainly couldn't! If Pharaoh wouldn't approve of it, the enslavement of the Jews could not have taken place. Why is Pharaoh being punished?

C. Subject to Change.....11

The Rebbe cites another passage of Maimonides, explaining how to weed out false prophets. If a prophecy for good isn't fulfilled, the person is a false prophet. But if a prophecy for bad things to come isn't fulfilled, that doesn't prove the person is a false prophet, for negative prophecies are subject to change (Source 6).

Maimonides supports this with a story from the Torah: Jeremiah prophesied that the Jewish people would soon be under Babylonian rule and Chananiah prophesied the opposite—G-d will upend the Babylonian rule. Jeremiah told Chananiah that if his prophecy of future good does not come to fruition, he will be deemed a false prophet, however if his own prophecy of doom doesn't materialize, it proves nothing, for G-d can always "change his mind" when it comes to harsh decrees (Source 7).

With this in mind, the Rebbe explains why Pharaoh and the Egyptians were punished: Although enslaving the Jews was a Divine decree, G-d could have recanted, thus the decree did not obligate Pharaoh. If he would have refrained from carrying it out, G-d might have changed His mind.

Indeed, a Roman general once refused to take part in the destruction of Jerusalem and ran off and converted (Source 8). Moses also refused to be a part of G-d's plans to destroy the Jewish people, telling G-d to "erase" him from the Torah, and ultimately persuading G-d to forgive His people.

In addition to the idea of free choice, there is another powerful lesson for us all: Never give up. Even if G-d has decreed, He can still change His mind. This is also seen in a story with King Chizkiyahu, where, though G-d had decided to punish him, it was not too late to pray (Sources 9 and 10).

Introduction

Over the past few weeks we have been reading in the Torah about the exile in Egypt and the ten plagues Pharaoh and the Egyptian nation were punished with. But our story actually begins much earlier, when G-d made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants—the chosen people.

Examining his story in its totality led to a fascinating debate among generations of Jewish scholars about human free choice and Divine reward and punishment. The Rebbe enters the fray and provides a unique perspective.

השיעור לפרשת בא

משיחת י"ד אייר, פסח שני, ה'תשד"מ,
הנחה בלתי מוגה.
תורת מנחם ה'תשד"מ חלק ג' עמודים 1705-1701

[לצפיה בוידאו מהשיחה בתכנית תורת חיים לחץ כאן](#)



A. Historical Background

When G-d famously revealed Himself to Abraham, He made a covenant with him, telling him that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land.

Source 1 Genesis, 15: 12-14

Student's As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep
pg. 3 sleep and a great fright and darkness fell over him. Then G-d said to Abram: "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs for 400 years, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. But I will punish the nation that enslaved them, and afterwards they will go forth with great wealth

וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לָבוֹא, וַתִּרְדָּמָה נִפְלָאָה
עַל אַבְרָם, וְהִנֵּה אֵימָה חֹשֶׁכָה
גְּדֹלָה וּנְפִלַת עָלָיו. וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם:
יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ
לֹא לָהֶם, וְעַבְדוּם וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם
אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה. וְגַם אֶת הַגּוֹי
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנִי, וְאַחֲרָי כֵּן
יֵצְאוּ בְרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל.

Three generations later, G-d's words come to pass. The Jews go down to Egypt, where the Egyptians enslave them and embitter their lives.

Source 2 Exodus, 1:13-14

Student's The Egyptians enslaved the children of Israel
pg. 3 with harsh labor. They made their lives bitter with hard labor, with clay, bricks, and with all kinds of labor in the fields. In all their harsh labor, the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּכָפָר. וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעַבְדָּה
קָשָׁה, בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל עַבְדָּה
בַּשָּׂדֶה, אֶת כָּל עַבְדֹתָם אֲשֶׁר
עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּכָפָר.

After 210 years of harsh and bitter slavery, G-d hears the groans of the Jews and decides the time has come to free them.

Source 3 Exodus, 2:23-24

Student's During that long period, the king of Egypt died,
pg. 3 and the children of Israel groaned from the labor.

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ
מִצְרַיִם, וַיִּאָּנְחוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן
הָעַבְדָּה וַיִּזְעְקוּ, וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל
הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הָעַבְדָּה.

Student's They cried out, and their cry from their slavery
pg. 3 ascended to G-d. G-d heard them groaning, and
G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham,
with Isaac, and with Jacob.

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם, וַיִּזְכֹּר
אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת אַבְרָהָם אֶת
יִצְחָק וְאֶת יַעֲקֹב.

G-d sends Moses to speak with Pharaoh, and tells him that He will punish the Egyptians for what they did to the Jews.

Source 4 Exodus, 10:1-2

Student's The L-rd said to Moses: "Come to Pharaoh, for
pg. 4 I have hardened his heart and the heart of his
servants, so that I may perform My signs among
them, and in order that you tell your children
and grandchildren how I made a mockery of the
Egyptians, and how I performed My signs among
them, and you will know that I am the L-rd."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה: בֹּא אֶל
פַּרְעֹה, כִּי אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת לְבוֹ
וְאֶת לֵב עַבְדָּיו לְמַעַן שְׁתִּי אֶתְתִּי
אֱלֹה בְּקִרְבּוֹ. וְלַמַּעַן תִּסְפֹּר בְּאָזְנֵי
בְּנֵי וְבָנֹת בְּנֵי אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלֹתִי
בְּמִצְרַיִם, וְאֶת אֶתְתִּי אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַתִּי
בָּם וַיִּדְעוּתָם כִּי אֲנִי ה'.

This concludes the Biblical story.

B. Free Choice

At a Chassidic gathering on Pesach Sheni 1984, the Rebbe quoted several sources about the fundamental beliefs of free choice and reward and punishment. The Rebbe then asked a question that arises from the historical episode we are discussing.

First, the Rebbe quoted Maimonides's words about every individual's free choice.

Source 5 Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance, 5:1-2; 6:5

Everyone Can Choose Between Good and Evil

Student's
pg. 5

Everyone is given a choice, if one wants to follow the path of good and be righteous, it is in his hands...

Do not entertain the notion the fools of the nations say, that when a person is born G-d decrees whether they will be righteous or wicked. This is not the case. Every person can be as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Yeravam. A person can be wise or foolish, kind or cruel, miserly or generous, etc. Nobody can force him, decree upon him, or pull him in either direction. He himself decides which way he wishes to go...

Thus, a sinner is responsible for his own sins. He should therefore cry over his sins and what he did to his soul... Since the choice is ours and the sins are of our own doing, we should repent and abandon evil, because now we have the ability to do so.

רְשׁוֹת לְכֹל אָדָם נְתוּנָה, אִם רָצָה
לְהִטּוֹת עֲצָמוֹ לְדֶרֶךְ טוֹבָה וְלִהְיוֹת
צַדִּיק הָרְשׁוֹת בְּיָדוֹ...

אֵל יַעֲבֹר בְּמַחְשַׁבְתְּךָ דְבָר זֶה
שְׂאוּמְרִים טַפְשֵׁי אַמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא גּוֹזֵר עַל הָאָדָם
מִתְחַלֵּת בְּרִיתוֹ לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק אוֹ רָשָׁע,
אִין הַדְּבָר כֵּן. אֵלָּא כָּל אָדָם רְאוּי לוֹ
לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק כְּמֹשֶׁה רַבְּנוֹ, אוֹ רָשָׁע
כְּיִרְבָּעָם, אוֹ חָכָם אוֹ סָכָל, אוֹ רַחֲמָן
אוֹ אֲכֹזְרִי, אוֹ כִּילִי אוֹ שׁוֹעֵ, וְכֵן שְׂאָר
כָּל הַדְּעוֹת. וְאִין לוֹ מִי שִׁיכְפְּהוּ וְלֹא
גּוֹזֵר עָלָיו וְלֹא מִי שֶׁמּוֹשְׁכוֹ לְאַחַד
מִשְׁנֵי הַדְּרָכִים, אֵלָּא הוּא מְעַצְמוֹ
וּמַדְעֵתוֹ נוֹטֶה לְאֵי זוֹ דֶּרֶךְ שִׁירָצָה...

וְכִינֵן שְׂכָן הוּא, נִמְצָא זֶה הַחוּטָא
הוּא הַפְּסִיד אֶת עֲצָמוֹ. וְלִפִּיכֵךְ רְאוּי
לוֹ לְבַכּוֹת וּלְקוֹנֵן עַל חַטָּאָיו וְעַל מַה
שֶׁעָשָׂה לְנַפְשׁוֹ וּגְמֻלָּה רָעָה... הוּאִיל
וְרִשׁוּתָנוּ בְּיָדֵינוּ וּמַדְעֵתָנוּ עֲשִׂינוּ כָּל
הַרְעוֹת, רְאוּי לָנוּ לְחֹזֵר בַּתְּשׁוּבָה
וְלַעֲזֹב רָשָׁעֵנוּ שֶׁהָרְשׁוֹת עֵתָהּ
בְּיָדֵינוּ...

Without Free Choice, Punishment is Unjust

The Rebbe continued by citing Maimonides on why we must have the freedom to choose between good and evil.

Student's Were G-d to decree that a person will be
pg. 5 righteous or wicked, how could He command us via His prophets to "do this and not that," "better your ways and don't follow your evil desires," if

Student's He had already decreed at birth that his nature
pg. 6 will pull him impossibly in one direction? What relevance would the Torah have? How could a sinner be punished and a righteous person rewarded? "Will the judge of all the land not do justice?"...

Rather, man has free choice and all his actions are of his own choice. There is nothing that forces him, or pulls him, only he with his G-d-given faculties does what he wants. Therefore, a person is judged by his actions. He is rewarded for good and punished for sin.

אלו האל היה גוזר על האדם להיות צדיק או רשע... היאך היה מצווה לנו על ידי הנביאים "עשה כן ואל תעשה כן", "היטיבו דרכיכם ואל תלכו אחרי רשעכם", והוא מתחלת בריתו כבר נגזר עליו או תולדתו תמשך אותו לדבר שאי אפשר לזוז ממנו? ומה מקום היה לכל התורה כלה? ובאי זה דין ואיזה משפט נפרע מן הרשע או משלם שכר לצדיק? "השפט כל הארץ לא יעשה משפט?"...

האדם רשותו בידו וכל מעשיו מסורין לו, ולא יהיה לו לא כופה ולא מושך אלא הוא מעצמו ובדעתו שנתן לו האל עושה כל שהאדם יכול לעשות. לפיכך דנין אותו לפי מעשיו. אם עשה טובה מיטיבין לו ואם עשה רעה מרעין לו.

Here comes the great question:

Why Were the Egyptians Punished?

Student's The Torah states (Genesis 15:13): "They will
pg. 6 enslave them and torment them." If G-d decreed that the Egyptians were to enslave the Jews, why were they punished?

והלא כתוב בתורה (בראשית טו, ג) "ועבדום וענו אתם", הרי גזר על המצריים לעשות רע... ולמה נפרע מהו?

This story demonstrates the opposite. G-d clearly told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land. What choice did the Egyptians have? Why did G-d punish them—this was His design all along?!

Maimonides' Explanation

Student's The individual Egyptian tormenting the Jews
pg. 6 had the choice not to. G-d didn't decree that any specific Egyptian enslave the Jews, rather G-d informed Abraham that his descendants would ultimately be enslaved in a land that was not theirs.

הַמְצַרִּים, כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵאוֹתָן
הַמְצַרִּים וְהַמְרַעִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל,
אֵלּוּ לֹא רָצָה לְהִרְעוֹ לָהֶם הַרְשׁוֹת
בְּיָדוֹ. שְׁלֹא גָזַר עַל אִישׁ יְדוּעַ,
אֲלֹא הוֹדִיעוּ שְׁסוּף זָרְעוֹ עֲתִיד
לְהִשְׁתַּעֲבֵד בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם.

Maimonides explains that the decree was only that the Jews will be enslaved in Egypt, but not that any specific Egyptian would enslave them. Each individual Egyptian had the ability to behave humanely and resist the surrounding environment. They were punished for making the choice to participate in the oppression.

The Rebbe cite's Raavad's objection to Maimonides' explanation:

>> The Rebbe

The Raavad's question

Student's How can it be said for every individual
pg. 7 Egyptian that he had free choice and G-d didn't decree that he would participate in the oppression of the Jews? G-d had decreed that the Jews would be oppressed, so one of them would end up implementing that decree!

כִּיצַד אִפְשָׁר לֹמַר עַל כָּל אֶחָד
וְאֶחָד מֵהַמְצַרִּים שֶׁעָלִיו לֹא גָזַר
הַקַּב"ה מֵאוֹמָה - הִרִי בְהַכְרַח
שֶׁגִזְרָה זֶה צָרִיכָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם עַל יְדֵי
מִי־שֶׁהוּ?!

Had all of the Egyptians chosen to be good and moral people and not enslave the Jewish people. G-d's decree would have gone unfulfilled. Clearly then some of the Egyptians were required to oppress the Jews. This raises the question of how they can be punished for their actions.

The Rebbe goes on to further sharpen Raavad's question.

Pharaoh himself couldn't have chosen differently

Student's In addition, this question is even stronger
pg. 7 regarding Pharaoh himself. In order for the Egyptians to enslave the Jewish people, Pharaoh's consent was required, because he was the all-powerful ruler. Historically it did happen that way, Pharaoh told his people "let us act cunningly with the Jews," and the Talmud relates that Pharaoh enticed the Jews into their slavery by initially pretending to partake in the hard work himself. Therefore, even if we are to say that there was no Divine decree on each individual Egyptian that they must take part in the oppression, Pharaoh's role certainly must have been preordained!

ויש להוסיף בזה - קושיה זו גדולה ביותר בנוגע לפרעה מלך מצרים: כדי שהמצריים ישעבדו את בני ישראל - היה צורך בכך שפרעה מלך מצרים [שהיה "מושל בכיפה"¹] יסכים לכך, וכפי שאכן היה בפועל - שהוא בא בעצה תחילה, שנאמר² "ויאמר אל עמו גו' הבה נתחכמה לו גו'", ותפלה לְבִינָה בצווארו כו'³, ורק על ידי זה היתה האפשרות לשיעבודן של ישראל. על פי זה - גם אם נאמר בנוגע לכל אחד ואחד מהמצריים שעליו לא נגזרה הגזירה, הרי בהכרח שנגזרה על פרעה מלך מצרים!?

One can argue about if each individual Egyptian had a choice whether or not to be involved in the oppression. But about Pharaoh himself there's no room for doubt. It is clear that without Pharaoh's consent, the Jewish people couldn't have been enslaved and G-d's decree would go unfulfilled. Since Pharaoh couldn't have actually had free choice in this regard, how could he be punished for his actions?

As mentioned, this question occupied many of the great Torah scholars over the generations. Later in this address the Rebbe quotes the explanations of Raavad and Ramban that the punishment wasn't for the actual enslavement—which was by divine decree—but for embittering the lives of the Jews even more than required. The Rebbe raises various difficulties with these explanations.

The Rebbe then goes on to offer his own explanation for this fascinating question.

(3) טושה יא, א.

(1) ראה מכילתא עה"פ בשלח יד, ה. זח"ב ו, א.
(2) שמות א, ט"י.

C. Subject to Change

In the lead-up to his explanation, the Rebbe quotes a passage from Maimonides on a different subject altogether, which will help us explain the matter.

Student's **Source 6a** Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Yesodei Hatorah, 10
pg. 8

Validating a Prophet Based on Prophecies of the Future

Historically, prophecy was a very real concept among the Jews. Each generation had prophets who received messages from G-d and transmitted them to the Jewish people. This incredible method of communication had a pitfall too—imposters. Charlatans claiming to be prophets would bring “messages” from on high. How did the people determine who was a prophet and who was a charlatan?

Maimonides tells us the solution in the following passage:

A prophet who arises and says G-d sent him does not need to perform a sign or miracle that changes nature, such as those performed by Moses, Elijah or Elisha. The only sign he must perform is telling the future...and we wait to see if it will come to fruition or not. If it was even slightly inaccurate, we know he is a false prophet, but if it all came to pass, he is to be trusted.

כָּל נְבִיא שֶׁיַעֲמִד לָנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר שֶׁה' שְׁלָחוּ, אֵינּוּ צָרִיךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹת כְּאַחַד מְאוֹתוֹת מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ אוֹ כְּאוֹתוֹת אֱלֹהֵי וְאַלִּישַׁע שְׁנֵי שִׁבְעֵם שְׁנוּי מְנַהֲגוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אֲלֵא הָאוֹת שֶׁלוֹ שִׁיאֲמַר דְּבָרִים הַעֲתִידִים לִהְיוֹת בְּעוֹלָם... וְאִנּוּ מְחַפְּיִם לְרְאוֹת הַיְבֹאֵוּ דְּבָרָיו אִם לֹא יבֹאוּ. וְאַפְלוּ נִפְל דְּבַר קִטָּן בְּיָדוֹעַ שֶׁהוּא נְבִיא שֶׁקֶר, וְאִם בָּאוּ דְּבָרָיו כָּלּוּ יִהְיֶה בְּעֵינֵינוּ נֶאֱמָן.

Maimonides says that only if the prophet predicted the future completely accurately is he believed. However, he adds a caveat:

A Prophecy of Doom Can Change

Student's Prophecies of a negative nature, for example, “so and so will die,” or “this year will be a year of famine or war”- if these prophecies do not come to pass, this does not contest the person's
pg. 8

דְּבָרֵי הַפְּרָעוֹנוֹת שֶׁנְּבִיא אוֹמֵר, כְּגוֹן שִׁיאֲמַר פְּלוֹנֵי יָמוּת אוֹ שֶׁנָּה פְּלוֹנֵי תֵּעָב אוֹ מְלַחְמָה וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּדְבָרִים אֵלּוּ, אִם לֹא

Student's
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validity as a prophet. G-d is benevolent and compassionate, and He may have forgiven the people, like in the case of Ninveh, or awaited their repentance, as He did with Chezkhiah.

But if the person promised good things, saying “such and such will happen” and it did not materialize, we know he is a false prophet. Any good that G-d promises, even conditionally, will come to pass...This shows us that a prophet is only validated with positive predictions.

עמדו דבריו אין בזה הכחשה
לנבואתו. ואין אומרים הנה דבר
ולא בא. שהקדוש ברוך הוא ארך
אפים ורב חסד, ונתם על הרעה,
ואפשר שעשו תשובה ונסלח
להם כאנשי נינוה. או שתלה להם
כחזקה.

אבל אם הבטיח על טובה ואמר
שיהיה כך וכך ולא באה הטובה,
שאמר בידוע שהוא נביא שקר.
שכל דבר טובה שיגזר הא-ל
אפלו על תנאי אינו חוזר... הא
למדת שבדברי הטובה בלבד יבחון
הנביא.

If a positive prophecy does not materialize, this indicates that the person is a false prophet. But if a negative prophecy doesn't materialize, this isn't a sign that the person is a charlatan, because G-d can forgive and change His mind.

Maimonides supports this with a fascinating story from the Torah:

Jeremiah And Chananiah Go Head To Head

Historical background: This event takes place late in the First Temple period. The Babylonians have captured Jerusalem and taken thousands of Jews captive—the elite of the nation—pillaged the Holy Temple, and looted the gold and silver holy vessels.

The Babylonians left the rest of the nation under the rule of Yehoyakim, and the Jews had to pay taxes to Babylonia, like the surrounding lands. The local kings weren't happy and toyed with the idea of rebelling and fighting for independence.

Source 7 Jeremiah, 27:1-7, 28:1-4, 9-11

Student's In the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim the
pg. 9 son of Yoshiyahu, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the L-rd, saying:

So said the L-rd to me; Make [a yoke of] straps and bars and place them upon your neck.

Then send them to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Zidon, through the envoys who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah the king of Judah.

Give them a message for their masters saying: So said the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of Israel; so shall you say to your masters: I made the earth, and the man and the beast that are upon the face of the earth, with My great strength and with My outstretched arm, and I give it to whomever I please.

Now, I have given these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant. I have even given him the beasts of the field to serve him.

All nations shall serve him and his son and his son's son until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and kings will subjugate him.

G-d reveals Himself to Jeremiah and sends a message to the king of the Jews and the other local kings: Remain under Babylonian control. This is G-d's will. Like many other prophecies, G-d commands Jeremiah to demonstrate the prophecy. G-d tells him to take a wooden yoke, place it around his neck, thereby displaying to the people that they must stay under the yoke of Babylon.

Suddenly, a man appears claiming to also be a prophet, and he has a completely different message from G-d!

...Chananiah ben Azur said to me in the house of the L-rd before the priests and all the people, saying:

So said the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of Israel, saying: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.

בְּרֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ יְהוֹיָקִים בֶּן יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה, הָיָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֶל יְרֵמְיָה מֵאֵת ה' לֵאמֹר.

כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי, עֲשֵׂה לְךָ מוֹסְרוֹת וּמוֹטוֹת וּנְתַתֶּם עַל צַוְאֲרֶךְ.

וְשַׁלַּחְתֶּם אֶל מֶלֶךְ אֲדוֹם וְאֶל מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב וְאֶל מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וְאֶל מֶלֶךְ צֹר וְאֶל מֶלֶךְ צִידוֹן בְּיַד מַלְאָכִים הַבָּאִים יְרוּשָׁלַם אֶל צְדַקְיָהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה.

וְצִוִּיתִי אֹתָם אֶל אֲדֹנֵיהֶם לֵאמֹר, כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, כֹּה תֹאמְרוּ אֶל אֲדֹנֵיכֶם. אֲנֹכִי עֲשִׂיתִי אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֶת הָאָדָם וְאֶת הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ, בְּכַחַי הַגָּדוֹל וּבְזַרְעֵי הַנְּטוּיָה, וּנְתַתִּיהָ לְאִשְׁרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵינַי.

וְעַתָּה אֲנֹכִי נֹתַתִּי אֶת כָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה בְּיַד נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל עַבְדִּי, וְגַם אֶת חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה נֹתַתִּי לוֹ לְעַבְדּוֹ.

וְעַבְדוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל הַגּוֹיִם וְאֶת בְּנֵי וְאֶת בְּנֵי עַד בָּא עַת אֲרִצּוּ גַם הוּא, וְעַבְדוּ בּוֹ גּוֹיִם רַבִּים וּמְלָכִים גְּדֹלִים.

...אָמַר אֱלִי חַנְּנִיָּה בֶן עֲזוּר הַנְּבִיא אֲשֶׁר מִגְּבַעוֹ, בְּבַיִת ה' לְעֵינַי הַכֹּהֲנִים וְכָל הָעָם לֵאמֹר.

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר, שִׁבַרְתִּי אֶת עַל מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל.

In another two years, I will restore to this place all the vessels of the house of the L-rd that Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has taken from here and brought to Babylon.

I will also bring back to this place Yechoniah the son of Yehoyakim the king of Judah and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon, says the L-rd, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon...

Chananiah's message is far more appealing: G-d will break the yoke of Babylon and return all the exiles and holy temple vessels back to Israel.

Chananiah also demonstrates his "prophecy":

Student's Chananiah took the yoke off the neck of Jeremiah
pg. 10 the prophet and broke it.

Then Chananiah said before all the people: This is what the L-rd says: So too will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, off the neck of all the nations in another two full years. At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way.

Chananiah takes the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and breaks it in front of everyone, proclaiming that this is how G-d will crush Nebuchadnezzar's yoke! We can only imagine whom the nation chose to believe.

Jeremiah said: The prophet who prophesies for peace, when it materializes, it will be known who is the prophet whom the L-rd has truly sent.

בְּעוֹד שְׁנַיִם יָמִים אָנִי מְשִׁיב אֶל
הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֶת כָּל כְּלֵי בַיִת ה'
אֲשֶׁר לָקַח נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר מִלְּךְ בָּבֶל
מִן הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיְבִיאֵם בָּבֶל.

וְאֶת יְכֹנְיָה בֶן יְהוֹיָקִים מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה
וְאֶת כָּל גְּלוּת יְהוּדָה הַבָּאִים בָּבֶלָה
אָנִי מְשִׁיב אֶל הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה נְאֻם
ה', כִּי אֲשַׁבֵּר אֶת עַל מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל...

וַיִּקַּח חֲנַנְיָה הַנְּבִיא אֶת הַמוֹטָה
מֵעַל צִנּוֹר יִרְמְיָה הַנְּבִיא
וַיִּשְׁבְּרֶהוּ. וַיֹּאמֶר חֲנַנְיָה לְעֵינָיו
כָּל הָעָם לֹאמֹר, כֹּה אָמַר ה' כִּכָּה
אֲשַׁבֵּר אֶת עַל נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ
בָּבֶל בְּעוֹד שְׁנַיִם יָמִים מֵעַל
צִנּוֹר כָּל הַגּוֹיִם וַיִּלֶךְ יִרְמְיָה
הַנְּבִיא לְדַרְכּוֹ.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִרְמְיָה, הַנְּבִיא אֲשֶׁר יָנְבֵא
לְשֵׁלוֹם בָּבֵא דְבַר הַנְּבִיא וַיִּדַע
הַנְּבִיא אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַחוּ ה' בְּאַמְתּוֹ.

Source 6b Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Yesodei Hatorah, 10

Maimonides explains Jeremiah's response:

When Jeremiah prophesied doom and Chananiah foretold good, this is what Yirmiyah told Chananiah: If my words don't materialize, that won't prove that I am a false prophet. But if your words don't materialize, it will be known that you are a false prophet.

הוא שִׁירְמְיָהוּ אָמַר בְּתִשׁוּבָתוֹ
לְחַנְיָה בֶן עֲזוּרָה, כְּשֶׁהָיָה יִרְמְיָה
מִתְנַבֵּא לְרַעַה וְחַנְיָה לְטוֹבָה.
אָמַר לוֹ לְחַנְיָה: אִם לֹא יַעֲמְדוּ
דְּבָרַי, אִין בְּזָה רְאִיָּה שְׂאֲנִי נְבִיא
שָׁקֵר, אֲכַל אִם לֹא יַעֲמְדוּ דְּבָרַי
יִדַע שְׂאֲתָה נְבִיא שָׁקֵר.

I, Jeremiah says, foretell negative events. Therefore, even if my prophecy doesn't materialize, do not assume I am a false prophet, because G-d can change His mind. But you, Chananiah, foretell good. Know that if your words do not materialize, you will be known as a false prophet, because G-d does not change a positive decree.

The end of the story is well known: Chananiah, the false prophet, dies, and Jeremiah's prophecy comes to pass and the Holy Temple is destroyed.

>> The Rebbe

Student's The requirement that every prophecy delivered by a prophet must be fulfilled only applies to prophecies about positive occurrences. Negative prophecies, however, are subject to change, if people repent.
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כלומר: ההכרח לקיום דברי העתידות שאומר הנביא - אינו אלא בדברים טובים, מה שאין כן בדברי פורענות - יכול להיות שינוי, על ידי התשובה כו'.

Pharaoh Could Have Changed The Decree

This also applies to the Divine decree that the Egyptians would enslave and oppress the Jewish people. Since this was a negative matter, there was no guarantee that it would be fulfilled, it was subject to change through repentance. The decree was thus dependent on Pharaoh's will, and he could therefore be punished for his bad choices.

ולכן: גם כאשר פרעה ידע אודות הגזירה "ועבדום וענו אותם" - הרי מכיון שזהו ענין של פורענות, ישנו פסק דין בתורה שיכול להיות שינוי בדבר (על ידי תשובה וכיוצא בזה), ואין כל הכרח שגזירה זו תתקיים, ואם כן, תלוי הדבר ברצונו של פרעה, ולכן נענש על זה..

This is the answer to the fascinating question we asked: Why did G-d punish the Egyptians despite the enslavement of the Jews being a Divine decree?

The classic sources give varying answers. Some differentiate between the decree and the actions - perhaps the decree was on the collective but not on individual Egyptians. Or, perhaps the decree was for slavery but not the degree of cruelty the Egyptians demonstrated on their own accord.

The Rebbe explains it very differently. Yes, the decree of slavery was by Divine design, and it seems Pharaoh knew of the decree (because Abraham told his descendants, including Yishmael and his

children, and it certainly leaked) but that didn't obligate Pharaoh. If Pharaoh chose not to torment the Jews he wouldn't have to, for a prophecy of doom can be changed. G-d can change His mind. Nobody forced Pharaoh and the Egyptians to enslave the Jews. They were punished because they chose to do so.

A similar story took place when G-d sent the Romans to destroy Jerusalem.

Source 8 Talmud, Gittin, 56a

Student's The Roman authorities sent Nero Caesar against the Jews. When he came to Jerusalem, he wished to test his fate. He shot an arrow to the east and the arrow came and fell in Jerusalem. He then shot another arrow to the west and it also fell in Jerusalem. He shot an arrow in all four directions of the heavens, and each time the arrow fell in Jerusalem.

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Nero then conducted another test: He said to a child: Tell me a verse that you learned today. He said to him as follows: "And I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel" (Ezekiel 25:14). Nero said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, wishes to destroy His Temple, and He wishes to wipe his hands with that man, i.e., with me. The Romans are associated with Edom, the descendants of Esau. If I continue on this mission, I will eventually be punished for having served as G-d's agent to bring about the destruction. So he fled and became a convert, and ultimately Rabbi Meir descended from him.

שָׁלַח עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת גִּירוֹן קִיסָר.
כְּאֲשֶׁר בָּא לִירוּשָׁלַיִם רָצָה לְנִסּוֹת
בְּגוֹרָל. זָרַק חֵץ לְמִזְרַח - בָּא הַחֵץ
וְנָפַל בְּכוּוֹן יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, זָרַק לְמַעְרָב
- בָּא נָפַל בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם, וְכֵן עָשָׂה
לְכָל אַרְבַּע רוּחוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם - וּבְכָל
פַּעַם בָּא וְנָפַל הַחֵץ בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם.

נִסָּה עוֹד גּוֹרָל. אָמַר לוֹ לְתִינוּק:
פְּסוּק לִי פְסוּקֵךְ שֶׁלְמַדְתָּ הַיּוֹם.
אָמַר לוֹ אֶת הַפְּסוּק: "וְנִתַּתִּי אֶת
נִקְמַתִּי בְּאֶדּוֹם בְּיַד עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל"
(יחזקאל כה, יד). אָמַר גִּירוֹן:
הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רוֹצֵה לְהַחְרִיב
אֶת בֵּיתוֹ, וְהוּא רוֹצֵה לְקַנֵּחַ אֶת
יָדָיו בְּאִישׁ הַזֶּה - בִּי, שֶׁלְבִסּוּף
אֶעֱנֵשׁ עַל שְׁהִייתִי הַשְּׁלִיחַ
לְעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת. בְּרַח וְהִלַּךְ וְהִתְגַּיַר,
וַיֵּצֵא מִמֶּנּוּ לְבִסּוּף ר' מֵאִיר.

In this case, Nero, the Roman general, refused to cooperate with G-d's decree and ran off and converted. Unfortunately, this didn't change G-d's mind.

A famous example of G-d changing His mind is when G-d is upset at the behavior of the Jews in the desert and decides to wipe them out and start afresh with Moses. Moses, with tremendous sacrifice, tells G-d: Please forgive the Jewish people. If you will not, erase me from Your Torah. Moses' sacrifice causes G-d to reverse his decision.

In addition to the powerful lesson of free choice in Judaism, there's a lesson for each one of us: Never give up. Even if G-d decreed, He can still reverse His decision,

We see this lesson expressed in the following amazing story:

Source 9 Isaiah, 38:1-2

Student's In those days Chizkiyahu became critically ill, and
pg. 11 Isaiah the son of Amotz, the prophet, came to him and said: "So has the L-rd said, 'Give instructions to your household, for you will die and you will not live. Chizkiyahu then turned his face to the wall, and he prayed to the L-rd.

בְּיָמִים הָהֵם חָלָה חִזְקִיָּהוּ לְמוֹת,
וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ בֶן אֲמוּצַי
הַנְּבִיא וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו: כֹּה אָמַר ה',
צוּ לְבִיתְךָ כִּי מֵת אַתָּה וְלֹא תַחֲיֶה.
וַיֹּסֵב חִזְקִיָּהוּ פָּנָיו אֶל הַקִּיר
וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל ה'."

Student's Source 10 Talmud, Berachot, 10a-b

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The Talmud sheds light on the meeting between Isaiah and King Chizkiyahu.

What is the meaning of "you will die and you will not live"? "You will die" refers to death in this world, and "you will not live" means you will have no share in the World-to-Come.

Chizkiyahu said to him: What is all of this? For what transgression am I being punished?

Isaiah said to him: Because you did not marry and engage in procreation.

Chizkiyahu apologized and said: I had no children because I saw through divine inspiration that the children that emerge from me will not be virtuous. [Chizkiyahu meant that he had seen that his children were destined to be evil. In fact, his son Menashe sinned extensively, and he thought it preferable to have no children at all.]

"מֵת אַתָּה" בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, "וְלֹא
תַחֲיֶה" לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.
אָמַר חִזְקִיָּהוּ לִישְׁעִיָּהוּ: עַל מָה
מִגִּיעַ לִי עֲנֹשׁ כֹּל כֵּךְ חֲמוּר?
אָמַר לוֹ: מִשּׁוֹם שְׁלֹא עָסַקְתָּ
בְּפִרְיָה וּרְבִיָּה.
אָמַר לוֹ: זֶהוּ מִשּׁוֹם שְׁחִזִיתִי בְרוּחַ
הַקֹּדֶשׁ שְׂיוּצָאִים מִמְּנֵי בָנִים
שְׂאִינָם הַגּוֹנִים!

Isaiah said to him: Why do you involve yourself with the secrets of the Holy One, Blessed be He? That which you have been commanded—the mitzva of procreation—you are required to perform, and that which is appropriate before G-d he will do.

Chizkiyahu said to Isaiah: Now give me your daughter as my wife; perhaps my merit and your merit will cause virtuous children to emerge from me.

Isaiah said to him: The decree has already been decreed against you and this judgment cannot be changed.

Chizkiyahu said to him: Son of Amotz, cease your prophecy and leave. [As long as the prophet spoke as G-d's emissary, Chizkiyahu was obligated to listen to him. He was not, however, obligated to accept Isaiah's personal opinion that there was no possibility for mercy and healing.]

Chizkiyahu continued: I have received a tradition from the house of my father's father, from King David, the founding father of the dynasty of kings of Judea: Even if a sharp sword rests upon a person's neck, he should not prevent himself from praying for mercy.

Having heard Isaiah's harsh prophecy, immediately "Chizkiyahu turned his face toward the wall and prayed to the L-rd"

Indeed, Chizkiyahu recovered and the prophet gave him his daughter as a wife. They bore children and built a family (the children indeed turned out to be wicked). We learn from this story that although G-d decided to punish the king, and the prophet informed him of this decree, telling him it was too late to change it, it was not too late. Chizkiyahu prayed and G-d forgave him and let him live.

משיחת י"ד אייר, פסח שני,

ה'תשד"מ

הנחה בלתי מוגה.

תורת מנחם ה'תשד"מ חלק ג' עמודים

1705-1701

אמר לו: למה לך לעסק בדברי
הנסתרות של ה' מה שאתה
מצוה בו עליך לעשות, ומה שנוח
לפני ה' - הוא יעשה.

אמר לו: הבא לי את בתך לאשה,
אולי הזכות שלי ושלך יועילו
ויצאו ממני בנים הגונים.

אמר לו: כבר נגזרה עליך גזרה.

אמר לו: בן אמוץ, פלה נבואתך
וצא! כך מקבלני מבית אבי
אבא - אפלו חרב חדה מנחת על
צוארו של אדם אל ימנע עצמו מן
הרחמים.

מיד: "ויסב חזקיהו פניו אל הקיר
ויתפלל אל ה'" (ישעיהו לח, ב).