

Mr. _____

5724

Baltimore, Maryland

Greeting and Blessing:

I am in receipt of your letter, in which you ask how being inscribed for a happy New Year on Rosh Hashanah, which implies predestination, can be reconciled with the idea of free will and freedom of action.

As you will be aware, much has been written and published on this subject, and it is difficult to discuss such a topic adequately in a letter. Nevertheless, inasmuch as you have asked the question, I will attempt to provide you here with a few salient points that hopefully should help clear up this problem in your mind.

The apparent contradiction between Divine knowledge and human freedom is the result of a misconception concerning the meaning of Divine knowledge, and its confusion with the ideas of predetermination and predestination. We can illustrate this point in the following way: when we know how another person acted in the past, it is obvious that this knowledge has not affected that particular individual's choice of action—his action preceded our knowledge. In the same way, foreknowledge does not necessarily affect an individual's freedom of action. Let us take this a stage further: imagine, for the sake of argument, a clairvoyant, capable of foreseeing a certain event. Inasmuch as the event is taking place regardless of this individual's foreknowledge, this foreknowledge would not affect the action. A final illustration: consider the

case of a psychiatrist whose knowledge of a certain individual is so profound that for many years he has been able to predict what the latter will do in the next few moments or hours. Again, this knowledge would not affect the actual behavior of that individual. Now, bearing in mind that G-d's knowledge is infinitely greater than that of our psychiatrist, it is surely not surprising that He should know of things in advance, not only in terms of minutes and hours but of months and years.

The difficulty you have in reconciling the idea of Hashem's judgement on Rosh Hashanah with the idea of free will and free choice throughout that year—inasmuch as the former already implies predestination—is a question that receives particular attention in the *Likkutei Torah* of the Old Rebbe¹ and, more recently and at greater length, in the *Kuntres Umaayon* of my father-in-law, of sainted memory. I am certain that these books are in the possession of the Lubavitcher friends whom you mention in your letter.

The essential point here is that the Divine determination that is made on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is a determination *in potentia*—it has yet to be actualized. That “actualization” depends on the Divine judgment which takes place every day, which in turn depends, to a great extent, upon the individual's conduct. The illustration in the above sources is the following: Suppose an individual was ‘sentenced’ on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to attain wealth during the year. “Wealth” can take a variety of forms, such as wealth of knowledge² or wealth in other spiritual matters, such as intellectual or emotional insights, etc.; and it may also take the form of riches, as commonly understood. The same is true in

1. *Likkutei Torah, Korach*, p. 55:b, *Kuntres Umayan*, p. 114.

2. *Nedarim*, 41a.

everything else. The final result is determined by the individual's own choice of actions and conduct, which come before Divine scrutiny and judgment every day. That is why we have our daily prayers, and request our daily needs in the She-moneh Esrei, in spite of the fact that general judgment has already been passed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

I trust that the above will not only clarify the matter but will also serve as a reminder that the essential thing is the deed, and the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* in the conduct of daily life. Moreover, from this a greater insight can be gained into the nature of the *mitzvot* and the general Jewish outlook on life, and this insight comes, not from theoretical speculation about the *mitzvot*, but from their actual performance.

With blessing,

[Sign.]