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## REJECTING, EMBRACING AND NEUTRALIZING DETERMINISM: RAV HUTNER IN DIALOGUE WITH THE IZHBITZER AND RAV TZADOK

Rabbi Isaac Hutner was an original thinker who creatively wove together various schools of thought into his magnum opus, *Pahad Yitzhak*. Mindful of the dangers involved in integrating divergent worldviews into a united structure, R. Hutner sought to reduce potential contradictions between theories by modifying disparate concepts to fit into a larger framework.

A prime example of the struggle R. Hutner faced in integrating conflicting theories regards the place of determinism in Judaism.<sup>1</sup> Determinism had a central place in the worldview of Rav Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izhbitz, and in that of his student Rav Tzadok of Lublin,<sup>2</sup> that were prevalent in young Hutner's Warsaw youth, and had a long-lasting impact on his thought.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as a student of Slabodka *musar*, R. Hutner was also well aware of the central place of free will in Judaism. How did R. Hutner reconcile Izhbitz's focus on God's omnipotence with Slabodka's emphasis on the grandeur of man and man's ability to change the course of history?

<sup>1</sup> The terms determinism, divine omnipotence, and divine foreknowledge (*yedi'a*) are used interchangeably, despite the acknowledgment of the differences between them. The same is true with the terms free will, free choice, and choice (*behora*).

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of studies exploring the deterministic elements in the writings of R. Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izhbitz and R. Tzadok, including: Joseph Weiss, "A Late Jewish Utopia of Religious Freedom," in D. Goldstein, ed., *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford University Press, 1985); Alan Brill, *Thinking God: The Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok of Lublin* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2002); Shaul Magid, *Hasidism on the Margin* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Herzl Hefter, "'In God's Hands': The Religious Phenomenology of R. Mordechai Yosef of Izbica," *Tradition* 43 (2013), 43-65.

<sup>3</sup> Hillel Goldberg, "Rabbi Isaac Hutner: A Synoptic Interpretive Biography," *Tradition* 22 (1987), 18-46; Yaakov Elman, "Rav Isaac Hutner's *Pahad Yitzhak*: A Torah Map of the Human Mind and Psyche in Changing Times," in S. Halpern, ed., *Books of the People* (Maggid Publishers, 2017).

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The first impression *Pahad Yitzhak* gives regarding free will is that of a classic *musar* text. An essay on Purim strongly attacked those who minimized free will, pointing to Amalek's denial of free will as the defining trait of that wicked nation, which contradicted the Talmudic adage "everything is in the hands of Heaven *except* for the fear of Heaven." Instead, Amalek believed, "everything is in the hands of Heaven *including* the fear of Heaven." Amalek's denial of free will, R. Hutner explains, is especially dangerous since it seems to increase God's honor by attributing all of man's actions to Him. This, R. Hutner emphasizes, is the opposite of the Torah's belief that the greatest revelations of God's glory are revealed only through man's freely chosen actions.<sup>4</sup>

R. Hutner's attribution of extreme determinism to Amalek seems to be a direct critique of the Izhbitz doctrine that "everything is in the hands of Heaven *including* fear of Heaven!"—the exact same statement which R. Hutner attributed to Amalek! Surprisingly, R. Hutner's explanation is actually based on the Izhbitzer's *Mei ha-Shiloah*. There, R. Leiner addressed a question: why in the battle against Amalek was it important for Moshe's hands to be raised? Amalek attributed all of its evil actions to God, arguing that, if God didn't want people to sin then He wouldn't have given them strength to sin. Therefore, answered R. Leiner, in the fight against Amalek, Moshe needed to encourage the Jews to pray, which he accomplished by keeping his hands held high, to show the power of human intervention. This is, thus far, consistent with R. Hutner.

However, R. Leiner was also bothered by why we find the opposite at the splitting of the sea, where God told Moshe not to pray. Why specifically when facing the Egyptians was Moshe commanded to be silent? He explains that Egypt attributed their success to their own strength.<sup>5</sup> In that case, says R. Leiner, God told Moshe not to pray. This showed Egypt that God's will can be achieved even with no human contribution, not even prayer.<sup>6</sup>

R. Hutner utilizes the portion of *Mei ha-Shiloah* that highlighted the power of free will, without mentioning the deterministic elements present in that passage. This case exemplifies his utilizing part of a thought from Izhbitz/Lublin to advance his teaching on the importance of man's actions, while bypassing the deterministic elements that are also found there.

<sup>4</sup> R. Isaac Hutner, *Pahad Yitzhak: Purim* (Gur Aryeh: Institute for Advanced Jewish Scholarship, 1966), 29:2.

<sup>5</sup> In contrast, see R. Tzadok's explanation highlighting Egypt's deterministic worldview, *Resisei Layla* #35.

<sup>6</sup> *Mei ha-Shiloah, Beshallah*, s.v. "Hashem yillahem lakhem."

In another essay, R. Hutner stresses that what makes humanity unique is its ability to choose. However, there are also dangers that come with choice, as stated, “It would have been preferable had man not been created than to have been created” (*Eruvin* 13b). This Gemara highlights the negative aspect of choice, while ignoring the potential benefits it offers. R. Hutner was troubled by this and asked a number of questions: Is the human being, the pinnacle of creation, a terrible mistake? Didn’t the Torah declare that man was “very good.” Why would it be better for a “very good” creation not to have been created? He explains this dissonance by asserting that there is a tremendous fear that man can choose to live an unproductive or sinful life. It would have been better if man were never created than to live in a meaningless way. Man has to appreciate the gravity of life: non-existence is better than senseless living. However, once he internalizes this message and commits to purposeful living, then certainly it is better to have been created. R. Hutner applies this lesson specifically to Rosh Hashana, which is a day that celebrates the creation of man.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, on Rosh Hashana there’s an emphasis on fear of Heaven since only after that is established is there room for excitement over the creation of man with his free choice.<sup>8</sup> Here, R. Hutner is following along the path of Slabodka with its celebration of human life and the opportunities it affords when lived responsibly.<sup>9</sup>

R. Tzadok, in a passage in *Peri Tzaddik*, asked a number of questions about the paradoxes found in Rosh Hashana, the same exact questions as R. Hutner, and provided a unique approach to the interaction between fear and joy on Rosh Hashana. The Jew’s fear of Heaven, R. Tzadok

<sup>7</sup> See the comments of R. Hutner’s teacher R. Yaakov Moshe Charlop, *Mei Marom*, vol. 7 (Beit Zevul, 1991), 113-18, who explained that Rosh Hashana is a day to transcend free will and enter into the realm of determinism. In contrast, the joy of Rosh Hashana, according to R. Hutner, is the celebration of man’s ability to choose freely.

<sup>8</sup> *Pahad Yitzhak: Rosh Hashana* (Gur Aryeh: Institute for Advanced Jewish Scholarship, 1986), #7. R. Hutner illustrated his point with a story of a young rabbinical court judge who approached his teacher crying, “I’m afraid I will issue the wrong ruling.” His teacher replied, “And who would you prefer hand down the verdicts? A person who’s not afraid?!” In life, R. Hutner continued, fear of Heaven is a sign that a person is ready to live with meaning. In *Ma’amarei Pahad Yitzhak: Sukkot* (Gur Aryeh: Institute for Advanced Jewish Scholarship, 2005), #29, 16, he creatively explained that the disagreement between “It would have been preferable had man not been created” and man “is very good” applies to every moment of life. The first view believes that it is better to be dead than to be alive. Conversely, according to the second perspective, it is better to be alive than to be dead.

<sup>9</sup> See R. Nosson Tzvi Finkel, *Ohr ha-Tzafun*, vol. 3 (Ha-Sekhel, 1977), 60-63, where he expounds on the immense benefits of even a moment of meaningful living. He connects this to the day of Rosh Hashana.

explained, brings joy to God. When the Jew realizes that he provided happiness to God he then rejoices. Therefore, the path toward joy on Rosh Hashana begins with fear.<sup>10</sup> Both R. Hutner and R. Tzadok are troubled with the dual nature of Rosh Hashana as a day marked by both fear and joy. R. Tzadok focused on the immediate experience of Rosh Hashana, while R. Hutner developed a broad theme looking at Rosh Hashana as a validation of man with his free will being “very good.”

R. Hutner was very troubled by the deterministic views that were prevalent in America in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>11</sup> The degradation of free will was an attack on the uniqueness of the human being. R. Hutner considered this phenomenon noteworthy enough to require a spiritual explanation. He sought Torah sources to understand why there had been a dramatic increase in the denial of free will over the preceding century.<sup>12</sup> Ramban writes that in the messianic era God will remove man’s free will; R. Hutner explains that, as that age approaches, denial of free will shall increase as well.<sup>13</sup> This view introduces the concept of the ultimate cessation of free will, which has no implications to divine service in the present. Any hint of man not having free will in the present, R. Hutner stresses, is a debasement of the human being.

Does man’s loss of free will in the messianic era serve as a diminishment? R. Hutner answers cryptically, “The removal of free will, caused by the strengthening of free will, is a manifestation of the richness of free will.”<sup>14</sup> R. Hutner explains this concept in greater detail elsewhere. His approach is based on R. Yisroel Salanter’s principle that a person’s self-imposed hardships in the performance of *mitzvot* are not factored into the principle of “according to the pain is the reward” (*Avot* 5:23). For example, if a person accustoms himself to certain sins it becomes harder to refrain from sinning. If in all cases he resists sin, he is not rewarded for the

<sup>10</sup> *Peri Tzaddik, Rosh Hashana, #22.*

<sup>11</sup> This view was attributed to Freud, who appreciated the impact his conception of the unconscious, with its accompanying realization that man was “not the master of his own home,” had on the pride of man. At the same time, his theories created novel ways to control symptoms and drives which were previously seen as uncontrollable. See Ernest Wallwork, *Psychoanalysis and Ethics* (Yale, 1991), 49-74, for a detailed exploration of the complexities and contradictions found in the psychoanalytic view of determinism and free choice.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most well-known example of R. Hutner’s use of Torah sources to explain a historical phenomenon was his *Jewish Observer* article about the Holocaust. See R. Hutner, “‘Holocaust’—A Study of the Term, and the Epoch it is Meant to Describe,” *Jewish Observer* 12:8 (1977), 3-9.

<sup>13</sup> *Pahad Yitzhak: Iggerot u-Ketavim* (Gur Aryeh: Institute for Advanced Jewish Scholarship, 1981), #42, based on Ramban to Deut. 30:6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

additional measure of difficulty caused by his own self-imposed sinful habits. Conversely, when a person chooses righteous actions until he becomes consumed with holiness that makes it difficult for him to sin, R. Hutner deduces, he is nevertheless rewarded in measure with the difficulty of his actions as measured from his pre-habituated position. In R. Hutner's perspective, the greatest expression of free will is when a person exercises his free will until he feels compelled to follow God's path. Then, even though he has no choice but to follow God's will, he is still rewarded for his righteousness because through his choices he achieved the state of no longer being able to perform evil.<sup>15</sup> This explains why "the removal of free will, caused by the strengthening of free will, is a manifestation of the richness of free will." A person can develop himself to the point where he has no choice but to follow God's will, while still receiving reward on every action performed. This explains how in the future a man without free will will continue to be rewarded for his actions, with no diminishment of his greatness.

At this point, one receives the impression that there are no deterministic elements in human divine service at present, only in the messianic era. However, a close reading of *Pabad Yitzhak* shows that deterministic influences play a major role in the transformational experiences of Torah and teshuva. R. Hutner needed to create an elaborate structure to explain how a deterministic perspective that is presently inaccessible can be transported into the present.

The great impact Torah study has on people cannot be explained rationally. What is the source of Torah study's mysterious power? To understand this, R. Hutner contrasts Torah learning's impact with that of mitzva performance. Regarding Torah it is stated "Learning Torah compels a person to perform righteous actions"; regarding mitzva performance the Mishna asserts, "One mitzva causes another mitzva." Why, with regard to Torah study, is the impact described through the prism of its effect on the individual, while for mitzva performance the focus is on how the deed begets another mitzva, with no mention of the performer of that deed?

To answer this question, R. Hutner returns to the Ramban, which states that in the messianic times there will be a removal of free will. How will the Jewish people observe the Torah during the messianic times when such performance is based on free choice, commandments, and reward,

<sup>15</sup> *Ma'amarei Pabad Yitzhak: Sukkot*, #65, 8-10; see *Mei Marom*, vol. 7, 137-140, where R. Charlop provided a similar answer but with a more direct approach on how to remove free choice.

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all of which will be irrelevant? It cannot be that the laws of the Torah will change, since those laws are immutable.

In resolving this, R. Hutner points to the significance of the Torah being called “the metaphor of the Original One; *meshal ha-Kadmon*” (see Rashi to Exodus 21:13). Why is Torah called a metaphor and what is the spiritual significance of referring to God, specifically in this context, the “Original One”? Torah in its most exalted form is suited for man without free choice.<sup>16</sup> Our present Torah, which is completely predicated on choice, is at most an analog, or a metaphor, to the original (*kadmon*), exalted Torah. Every aspect of the present Torah has a corresponding portion of Torah in the pristine version (the *nimshal*). When a person engages in Torah study, some of the light of the higher Torah penetrates into his being. This light changes him and creates a tendency for him to naturally act righteously, like the natural will of man in messianic times. Mitzva performance, on the other hand, despite its great spiritual worth, does not presently intertwine the person with the future post-free will existence.

The distinction between Torah and mitzvot is now clear. Unlike Torah study, which changes one’s orientation toward natural righteousness through providing a type of access to the messianic-era self, mitzva observance—while generating the drive toward further mitzvot—does not change one’s basic nature.<sup>17</sup> R. Hutner here brilliantly integrates deterministic elements into present day divine service, but only through a complicated formula, where present day deterministic elements receive their power from the future messianic era. R. Hutner uses this concept to explain a passage in *Arakhin* (15b) in which Torah study is offered as the repair for the sin of *lashon ha-ra*, as stated in Proverbs 15:4, “the healing of the tongue is [through] the tree of life [i.e., Torah].” There is a principle that each sin can be corrected through performing a mitzva with the very same limb or body part which transgressed. What, then, is unique about repairing one’s faculty of speech through learning Torah? Free will and choice are what distinguishes man from both angels and animals. The power of speech is a unique phenomenon that only humans possess. Therefore, R. Hutner shows that man has even more freedom when it comes to speech than actions. When man sins with his power of speech he defiles the faculty of free choice by abusing its most powerful expression. In contrast, Torah, which provides a taste of determinism, provides the greatest expression of

<sup>16</sup> See Ramban to Gen. 2:9, which explains that Adam prior to the sin had no free choice.

<sup>17</sup> *Pahad Yitzhak, Shavuot* (Gur Aryeh: Institute for Advanced Jewish Scholarship, 1971), #43.

free choice, as we explained how freely-chosen actions that remove man's free choice is the pinnacle of free choice. This explains why Torah study, which includes the removal of free will, serves as the antidote to evil speech, the ultimate abuse of free will.<sup>18</sup>

R. Hutner applies a similar formula of bringing the future into the present to explain the deterministic elements found in teshuva.<sup>19</sup> Many commentators are troubled with how teshuva undoes past actions,<sup>20</sup> as R. Hutner metaphorically asks, "how can you bring a murdered person back to life"? R. Hutner's view is that teshuva can work only if it has the power to retroactively show that the sinful act never occurred, rather the action is connected to the world of holiness.<sup>21</sup> A question still remains: How does teshuva transform sinful destruction into the realm of holiness?

The first step in R. Hutner's answer is an exploration of Rambam's statement: "Indeed, the Torah long since assured us that in the end, at the close of the period of exile, Israel will turn to repentance and be immediately redeemed."<sup>22</sup> How can there be a guarantee that man will do teshuva, asks R. Hutner, if he has free choice? Apparently man does *not* possess absolute free choice. There is a remainder which God withheld, over which man does not have control. Ultimately, God will not let evil fully dominate the Jewish people. There is a force in creation that makes sure mankind will eventually arrive at its destiny and "every action will be returned to holiness."

However, in the present we are unable to see how every action is holy. How then can the future guarantee be applied presently? R. Hutner again finds a way to bring the future into the present. The attribute of truth is generally associated with a strict approach to misconduct. Why, then, is truth one of God's attributes of mercy? He answers that God's attribute of truth expresses His constancy: He was (past), He is (present) and He will be (future). God's attribute of truth takes the future perspective, where all of man's actions are holy, and applies that perspective in today's

<sup>18</sup> R. Hutner also explained why the verse refers to the Torah specifically as "Etz Hayyim," "the tree of life," since this alludes to the ultimate triumph of life over death and good over evil, thereby highlighting the deterministic elements in learning Torah. *Pahad Yitzhak: Shavuot*, #43.

<sup>19</sup> See *Pahad Yitzhak: Yom Kippur* (Gur Aryeh: Institute for Advanced Jewish Scholarship, 1978), #7, where he also uses the formula of bringing the future into the present. However, in this case he does not connect it to the topic of determinism, despite elaborating on the concept of *yedia*, a term used for determinism.

<sup>20</sup> A prime example is found in *Mesillat Yesharim*, chapter 4.

<sup>21</sup> This is working with *Yoma* 86b, "Repentance performed out of love transforms willful sins into merits."

<sup>22</sup> Rambam, *Hilkhot Teshuva* 7:5.

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world. Therefore, the attribute of truth makes it possible for man to transform his sinful actions into the realm of holiness through entering the future perspective. Truth, which symbolizes God's timelessness, is therefore rightfully considered an attribute of mercy, as it brings the future perspective of all of man's actions being holy into the present.<sup>23</sup> This example highlights the complex mechanisms R. Hutner uses in order to accommodate deterministic elements within contemporary divine service predicated on man's free will. Determinism can be preserved only through bringing the light of the future into the present.

R. Tzadok similarly addressed the connection between teshuva and determinism. A prime example is found in his *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*: "The main part of teshuva... [which causes] his sins to be transformed into merits is when a person understands that all of his sins were also the will of God."<sup>24</sup> R. Tzadok explicitly connected determinism with teshuva. He explained that God, His knowledge, and His will are all one. Therefore, if there is divine foreknowledge then it must be that the sin, from His vantage point, was His will. R. Tzadok defined the act of teshuva as an understanding that God desired even one's sinful actions.

Despite the seeming convergence between R. Tzadok and R. Hutner on the connection between determinism and teshuva, a number of fundamental differences remain. R. Tzadok defined the act of teshuva as developing a strong belief that every action taken was God's will, while for R. Hutner this is not the act of teshuva, rather the mechanism that makes teshuva possible. They also differ regarding whether determinism can be accessed in this world through faith or only through a more elaborate mechanism. R. Tzadok's opinion is that through faith alone man can tap into the deterministic perspective; as described above, R. Hutner's view is that the perspective of foreknowledge can only be accessed through bringing the future into the present. There is also a distinction in the language they use: R. Tzadok explicitly explains that in teshuva sins are viewed as the will of God; R. Hutner uses more generic terminology that "everything can be returned to holiness." These differences highlight how R. Hutner integrates and at the same time neutralizes the deterministic doctrine of Izhbitz/Lublin.

However, R. Hutner also believes in the existence of an independent present-era sphere of determinism; the contemporary experience of free choice and the deterministic messianic era are not completely distinct. As we have seen, in messianic times people will receive rewards for their actions,

<sup>23</sup> *Pahad Yitzhak: Yom Kippur*, #6.

<sup>24</sup> *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, #40.

while presently there are ways to access determinism. Choice and determinism coexist on different levels at all times. R. Hutner refers to this phenomenon when he writes, “Every person who understands divine service knows that there are different domains of divine service. Each domain has its own laws and regulations. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the different rules in each domain.”<sup>25</sup> The difference between the present and the future relates to which model is more readily perceived by man, but both are present at all times.

R. Yonason David, R. Hutner’s son-in-law and a prestigious Rosh Yeshiva in his own right, explains that R. Hutner was following in the path of Rambam, who famously attempted to resolve the conflict between divine foreknowledge and free choice. Rambam suggests that the answer to this question is beyond human comprehension. This is how Raavad understood Rambam’s position. However, another way to understand this, R. David explains, is that Rambam asserts that God’s knowledge exists in a different sphere than human knowledge and therefore it is not a contradiction to free choice.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, R. David explains that determinism and free choice can coexist simultaneously, with each one functioning in a different realm.

This example shows the ongoing presence of determinism in pre-messianic times in R. Hutner’s school of thought. R. David stresses that determinism is always present, although in our time God’s determinism is not readily apparent or experienced. Determinism needs to be “borrowed” from the future to make it manifest in the present, but not because it is not in force until the messianic times.<sup>27</sup>

R. Tzadok also emphasized that God’s foreknowledge and man’s free choice coexist simultaneously in separate spheres and applied this to the Rambam as well.<sup>28</sup> He quoted the statement of Arizal, “In the place [spiritual world] where there is choice, there is no place for divine foreknowledge. And in the place where there is divine foreknowledge, there is no

<sup>25</sup> *Pahad Yitzhak: Iggerot u-Ketavim*, #43.

<sup>26</sup> Rambam, *Hilkhot Yeshuva* 5:5 and Raavad, op. cit. Further investigation is needed to see if such an interpretation fits into the language and context of Rambam. In the previous law, 5:4, Rambam wrote that God’s will is for man to have the power to choose, even against God’s will. For R. Tzadok, everything that happens is according to God’s will. Man is always implementing God’s will even when he is trying to do the opposite. Furthermore, 5:5 itself seems to be addressing God’s foreknowledge and how God knows man’s future actions; it does not assert that God’s foreknowledge shows that He had a preconceived plan that will surely happen, as is found in R. Tzadok.

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication, August 29, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> *Takkanat ha-Shavin*, #6.

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place for choice.”<sup>29</sup> Arizal is stressing, according to R. Tzadok, that although divine foreknowledge and free choice are both simultaneously present, they coexist in different spheres and cannot be revealed at the same time. A person on a higher spiritual level will be able to access the sphere of determinism, while those living in a lower plane will perceive the world through man’s actions.

Even the distinction between man’s perception of the present world versus the messianic era, which is so fundamental for R. Hutner, can also be found in R. Tzadok’s writing. He asked: Why is it forbidden to remind a repentant sinner of his previous transgressions if the sins after repentance are transformed into merits? This world lacks the clarity that all sins are part of the divine plan and are, from this perspective, merits. Therefore, the repentant sinner suffers embarrassment when reminded of his previous misdeeds. However, in messianic times it will be clear that even at the precise moment a person sinned he was nevertheless connected to God because he was performing His will.<sup>30</sup> R. Tzadok noted that, presently, a person can fully access the deterministic perspective only during prayer, when he acknowledges his complete dependence on God.<sup>31</sup>

Despite their essential agreement, there still remains fundamental differences between the approaches of R. Tzadok and R. Hutner. Both agree in the distinction between how sins are perceived presently and how they will be seen during the messianic times. They differ on how permeable of a wall separates choice and determinism. R. Tzadok’s opinion is that determinism can be accessed directly with thought and gain an even deeper appreciation during times of prayer, while R. Hutner requires a complex mechanism of bringing the future into the present, through Torah or repentance, to be able to access this awareness.

It is clear that R. Hutner grappled with R. Tzadok’s views on determinism. The two agree in many areas, including the constant coexistence of free will and determinism, the differences between the present and the future in the perception of free will and determinism, the central place determinism plays in teshuva, and the importance of mankind possessing free choice. Nevertheless, they present radically different paths toward

<sup>29</sup> Quoted at the end of R. Hayyim Vital’s *Arba Me’ot Shekel Kesef; Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, #40.

<sup>30</sup> *Takkanat ha-Shavin*, #5; for an alternative explanation see *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, #164.

<sup>31</sup> *Takkanat ha-Shavin*, #5; see also R. Tzadok’s *Dover Tzedek*, 139, where he also discusses ways to integrate the deterministic perspective with free will actions. For a more spiritual explanation, see *Tanya*, chap. 39, which explains that at the moment of standing in prayer man has access even into the highest spiritual world of *atzilut*.

divine service. R. Tzadok, based on the Izhbitz doctrine, emphasizes the importance of developing faith in God in order to access the perspective of determinism. R. Hutner does not encourage direct access to this perspective, only through intermediary actions such as Torah study or teshuva. R. Hutner's intense engagement with the topic of determinism and free will was atypical for the Lithuanian rabbinic culture, of which he was a prominent representative. However, his stress on free will and the impossibility of direct access to determinism is consistent with that culture's doctrines.