

An expanded version of Avichai Zur's doctoral dissertation on the paradox in R. Tzadok's doctrine is forthcoming from Tevunot Publishing House of Herzog College.

THE HIDDEN ROOT: THE EXISTENTIAL PARADOX OF RABBI TZADOK

What is the significance of human existence? Does a person have an internal subject (be it the Cartesian *Cogito* or the Authentic Subject of existentialism)¹ from which his attributes and actions are derived? Or is it the other way around: his deeds determine his self (as claimed by Nietzsche and his post-structural successors)? This question has implications not only in the existential and socio-political realms, but also in the metaphysical and theological ones; in fact, it can be derived from the classical question of the contradiction between infinite and absolute Divine foreknowledge, omniscience and will (which is the source of the human soul and subject) on the one hand, and human freedom of choice and creativity on the other hand.

I wish to present the unique, paradoxical position of R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin on this issue, a position that threads its way through all his writings. In order to do so, I will analyze significant passages from his vast writings, dealing with the existential perspective of the contradiction between Divine foreknowledge and human free choice. In light of the structured paradox in R. Tzadok's doctrine, which I will present, the methodological approach of this analysis will be based not on the sociological-historical context nor on the historical-philological analysis of the sources that had influenced him, but rather on a phenomenological

I would like to thank my Ph.D. advisor, Prof. Admiel Kosman, and the chairman of my disputation committee, Prof. Jonathan Schorsch, who both encouraged me to publish this article, and to Yonatan Fialkoff who assisted me in the editing process.

¹ This is a central concept in existentialist philosophy, which has replaced the objective truth of external reality with the internal authentic existence of the subject. In religious existentialism, human decisions made in accordance with the essence of the subject are "authentic decisions." In atheistic existentialism, human decisions, which recognize and accept the absence of a reliable metaphysics, express the authentic existence of the subject. See David Gurevitz and Dan Arav, *Entziklopedia shel ha-Ra'ayonot* (Bavel, 2012), 75.

and hermeneutical theory. I aim to analyze R. Tzadok's doctrine through a phenomenological comparison to concepts of other philosophers, and especially through understanding it from within by highlighting and conceptualizing the fundamental element that shines throughout his entire work and constitutes his unique mode of Hasidism: the foundational paradox of Divine foreknowledge (*Yedi'a*) and free choice (*Behira*).²

As will be later elaborated, this paradox appears in R. Tzadok's writings in form and in content, directly and indirectly; the two concepts will therefore be used here in a broad sense: the concept of *Yedi'a* will include all the factors that are liable to prevent human free will, as well as all absolute and unavoidable, necessary and fixed elements. The concept of *Behira*, on the other hand, will include all types of human free will proposed by philosophy and theology, as well as all contingent elements; that is, those elements that are not absolute or unavoidable and that are not necessary and fixed but relative and possible, coincidental and random, transient and temporary—some of which enable free will, derive from it, or enable creativity and dynamism.

Different Approaches to Determinism and Free Will

In its generalized form, the contradiction between Divine foreknowledge and human free will is the question of the contradiction between determinism and fatalism on the one hand (*Yedi'a*) and free choice (*Behira*) on the other. Philosophy and religious thought present five basic solutions to this question:³

- A. Pessimism**, according to which free choice is an illusion in relation to the *determinism* of the laws of science, of society or of the soul, or in relation to *fatalism* according to which everything is determined by some Divine entity (for example, polytheistic destiny and fortune, Muslim fatalism of the Ash'ari doctrine, or the Calvinist predestination).
- B. Libertarianism**, which rejects determinism and fatalism claiming full free choice in the *indeterministic* world.
- C. Compatibilism**, which creates a *harmonious synthesis* between the opposites, weakening one of them or both (such as Augustine's claim that God exists outside time and does not influence choice

² On this topic, see most recently in these pages, Dov Finkelstein, "Rejecting, Embracing and Neutralizing Determinism: Rav Hutner in Dialogue with the Izbitzer and Rav Tzadok," *TRADITION* 51:3 (2019), 57–67 [—Ed.].

³ The following is based on Avichai Zur, *Paradox ha-Yedi'a ve-ha-Behira be-Mishmat R. Tzadok ha-Kohen mi-Lublin* [Hebrew], Ph.D. dissertation (Potsdam University, 2018), 55–136.

within it, or Bertrand Russell's "Informative Foreknowledge," according to which God only has information about the future but this information does not determine the future).

- D. **Bipolarity**, which acknowledges the full power of the two opposites which exist on separate, parallel planes (for example, the Lurianic perception according to which Divine foreknowledge and free choice exist in two separate Divine worlds—*Atzilut* and *Asiyya*, respectively).⁴
- E. **Paradox**, which claims full power of the two opposites and even a mutual influence between them, which creates a difficult, yet fertile tension (such as Nietzsche's *secular* perception regarding the "Eternal Recurrence" together with the "Will to Power" of the "*Übermensch*").

As mentioned, R. Tzadok also introduces a *paradoxical* position with respect to this issue, but as we shall see, his perception of the paradox is *religious*.

R. Tzadok and the Izbitzer's Existential Fatalism

R. Tzadok grew up in a scholarly, rabbinic family and was recognized as a child prodigy. On account of halakhic problems he believed existed in his marriage, he feared for his status as a *Kohen*. When his wife refused a divorce, he journeyed to enlist a hundred rabbis to grant him permission to marry an additional wife (*heter me'a rabbanim*). During his travels he met R. Mordecai Yosef Leiner of Izbica and adopted his radical worldview, according to which "All is in the hands of Heaven" (see *Berakhot* 33b), even man's will and passions. He transformed from a Lithuanian *mitnaged* to a devoted Hasid in the court of R. Mordecai Yosef, and in his old age he himself became a Rebbe in Lublin.

The scholarly consensus is that R. Tzadok continued the fatalistic-existentialistic doctrine of his rabbi, whose doctrine emphasizes absolute Divine power (*Yedi'a*).⁵ Such a situation on the one hand fatalistically determines man's actions, yet on the other allows for significant auton-

⁴ R. Hayyim Vital, *Arba Me'ot Shekel Kesef* (Avraham Brendvien Publisher, 1988), 281–282. Notice that Rabbi Tzadok uses this bipolar source to support his paradoxical standpoint on the issue; see for example *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik* (Har Beracha Institute, 1998), 40, §102.

⁵ See for example: Amira Liwer, *Yesodot Paradoxaliyim be-Kitvei R. Tzadok ha-Kohen mi-Lublin*, M.A. thesis (Touro College, 1993), 50–88, 128–138. Idem, *Tora she-be-al-Peh be-Kitvei R. Tzadok ha-Kohen mi-Lublin*, PhD. Dissertation, (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006), 14–21, 72–73, 261–265, et al. Alan Brill, *Thinking God: The Mysticism of Rabbi Zadok of Lublin* (Yeshiva University Press, 2002), 168–174, et al.

omy, since in certain cases, he may violate the halakha and the normative law according to the dynamic will of God.⁶ According to Aviezer Cohen,⁷ this is a model of religious existentialism by which God's will is revealed in man's individual and unique will: He is revealed in man's heart (what R. Tzadok refers to as "the root of his soul" [*shoresh ha-neshama*], which is fixed and given to man by God)—even in his desires. This inner revelation is parallel to the religious-existentialist concept according to which God is revealed in one's internal authentic "subject"—replacing the rationalistic and idealistic striving for the objective truth of external reality. However, despite this individualistic nuance, R. Leiner's assertion in fact deprives man of his free will because man can but *reveal* his root, which is decreed by Heaven, rather than freely *establish* it.

R. Tzadok's doctrine is indeed saturated with assertions that parallel R. Leiner's claim that everything is directly in the hands of Heaven and the claim that human acts, even acts of sin, are determined by God. R. Tzadok even emphasized that not only human acts but even human thought is determined by God: "That he realizes that everything is God's deed and power, even the thought before it was created in a person's heart."⁸

In addition, fatalism appears in R. Tzadok's doctrine indirectly as well—in methodological and formative principles, which give significance to anything that seems coincidental. For example, the first appearance of a word in the bible;⁹ the shape of the letters and the way they are pronounced;¹⁰ sins and sinners mentioned by the Bible and the Talmud;¹¹

⁶ See for instance *Mei ha-Shilo'ah* (Mishor, 2005), vol. 1, 27, 129, 245, and more.

⁷ Aviezer Cohen, *Toda'a Atzmit be-Sefer Mei ha-Shilo'ah ke-Kli le-Kiyyum ha-Zika she-Bein ha-El ve-ha-Adam*, Ph.D. dissertation (Ben Gurion University, 2006), 40–46, 419–420.

⁸ *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, 39, §100.

⁹ *Yisrael Kedoshim* (Har Beracha Institute, 2000), 79, 7:1; *Poked Akarim* (Har Beracha Institute, 2006), 221, 1:1; *Kedushat ha-Shabbat* (Har Bercha Institute, 2008), 361, 7:86; et al.

¹⁰ *Mahshavot Haruz* (Har Beracha Institute, 2006), 21–22, 5:4; *Likkutei Ma'amarim* (Har Beracha Institute, 2008), 71, 11:2–3; *Peri Tzaddik* (Mesamhei Lev, 1999), vol. 2, 62, Bo §2; *ibid.*, vol. 5, 197–199, *Ki Tavo* §6, et al. See also Jonathan Grossman, "The Language and Letters Conception in R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin's Theosophy" [Hebrew], *Shana be-Shana* (2000), 396–436.

¹¹ *Mahshavot Haruz*, 15, 4:10; *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, 39–40, §100; *Resisei Layla* (Har Beracha Institute, 2003), 69, 36:3; *Likkutei Ma'amarim*, 18, *Sefer Yehoshua – Hakdama* §19; *Takanat ha-Shavin* (Har Beracha Institute, 1994), 140, 10:27.

opinions that had been rejected in the Talmud;¹² the location of a certain *sugya* in the Talmud;¹³ and more.¹⁴

Scholars tend to see R. Tzadok's doctrine as a mitigation of his rabbi's doctrine. For example, from his fatalistic stance, R. Leiner enables, as said, a halakhic breach—whereas according to R. Tzadok, despite his fatalism, such a breach depends on many halakhic conditions and although such an act is a “mitzva” (in the sense of an action according to divine will) it requires punishment and atonement and thus the bounds of halakha are not undermined.¹⁵

The Centrality of Free Will and Creativity

Despite these claims about R. Tzadok's fatalism, in many of his sermons, he stresses the dimension of *Behira* (free will). This not only in the narrow sense of concrete free will but in the wide sense of the contingent, sinning, dynamic, and creative human dimension (which simple reading and common sense attributes to man's free will):

As it is written (Job 22:28): “Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee” – a *Tzaddik* decrees and God fulfills (*Sota* 12a), because he [the *Tzaddik*] becomes [the one who] decides in the Heavenly court, and the halakha is according to him in his decrees against the decree of the upper law; because all the laws in all the upper worlds are according to the Torah – and the Torah is already given to [those who dwell in the] lower [world]... and the *Tzaddik*'s decree which persists, that is: that he says that this is what should be the appropriate law. That is what is called “decree” – when he decrees in trial that this should be appropriate and thus it comes to be.¹⁶

¹² *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, 48, §11; *Takanat ha-Shavin*, 225, 15:91; et al. See Liwer, *Tora*, 266–287.

¹³ *Kedushat ha-Shabbat*, 281, 3:5; *Peri Tzaddik*, vol. 5, 314, *Erev Yom ha-Kippurim* §1, et al. See Sara Friedland Ben Arza, “‘Proximity’ and ‘A Roof Over’ – About Two Formative Homiletical Principles in the Writings of R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin” [Hebrew], *Me'at la-Tzaddik*, ed. Gershon Kitzi (Bet, 2000), 269–288.

¹⁴ See Liwer, *Tora*, 370–419.

¹⁵ Cohen, *Toda'a Atzmit*, 357, fn. 235; Jerome I. Gellman, *The Fear, the Trembling and the Fire – Kierkegaard and Hasidic Masters on the Binding of Isaac* (University Press of America, 1994), 67–69.

¹⁶ *Takanat ha-Shavin*, 158, 12:15. Note: All the supplements in round brackets in the quotations in this essay are of R. Tzadok himself or, when referring to sources, of the editor of his writings; supplements to quotes in square brackets are mine. See also the higher source of oral Torah, which represents *Behira*, and its power over the written Torah, which represents *Yedi'a*, in *Mahshavot Haruz*, 100, 12:5: “The words of the Sages are more favored above the wine of Torah” (*Shir ha-Shirim*

In this and other sources—some of which will be analyzed in detail below—R. Tzadok highlights man's potent ability to change and *establish* (not merely *reveal*, as in R. Leiner's doctrine) the root of his soul and even affect Divine worlds and this world. In this sense, his doctrine not only does not mitigate R. Leiner's doctrine but in fact radicalizes it.

But how can such a radical view about man's free and creative power be consistent with R. Tzadok's own former position (which is undoubtedly emphasized in his writings, as we saw) according to which all things, including man's choices, are in the hands of Heaven?

As said, most scholars tend to claim that R. Tzadok continues the fatalistic doctrine of his teacher. Other studies have indicated a compromising synthesis that weakens one of the sides or both,¹⁷ or a bipolarity between the sides, which indeed stand in full force yet one beside the other with no mutual influence.¹⁸ According to these three interpretations (fatalism, synthesis, and bipolarity), the contradictions in R. Tzadok's writings are a problem that needs to be solved.

Rabba 1:18), because the written Torah is the prophecy comprehension by a great prophet like Moses... 'A Sage is favored above a prophet' (*Bava Batra* 12a), because he comprehends by the Holy Spirit, Upper Holiness, Upper Wisdom [*Zohar* III, 61a] which is placed above the written Torah... (*Beresheet Rabba* 17:8)... The comprehension of prophecy is greater from the perspective by which it has what to lean on which is the word of God... which are limited and fixed and valid. And from this perspective the comprehension of the Holy Spirit of the Sages of the oral Torah is greater, because although it is 'hovering in the air' [*Hagiga* 10a] since it does not have a fixed foundation to lean on clearly [in order] to know it is the living words of God... which are said by the Holy Spirit—since he [the Sage] takes [these words] from the wisdom of his heart and maybe he is wrong—nevertheless... his comprehension is without limit and border, and above all abundance of comprehension which is limited by the will of God... in the creation of the world." For R. Tzadok's emphasizing of the *Behira*—without the paradox perception which also leaves a place to the *Yedi'a*—see Aviya HaKohen, "A Sermon for Hanukka by Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin – A Preface and an Exegesis" [Hebrew], in *Be-Orkha Nireh Or*, eds. A. Ariel and I. Rozenson (Kohen Family, 2004), 229–245.

¹⁷ See for instance Liwer, *Yesodot*, 73–38. Idem, *Tora*, 14–21, 72–73, 261–265. Although Liwer discusses the paradoxical foundation of Rabbi Tzadok's doctrine, she sees it as a problem that must be solved, and, indeed, tries to do so by suggesting different models of synthesis. Nevertheless, in most cases the synthesis is only apparent in the perspective of this world, but in the world to come it will be revealed that all was in the hands of Heaven. See also Eitan Abramovitch, "The Dialectics of the Jew and the Gentile – Hegel and R. Tzadok on Desire, Identity and Otherness" [Hebrew], *Kuntres* 25 (2011), 87–112. For a wide discussion on these interpretations (as well as Grossman's interpretation, fn. 18), see Zur, *Paradox*, 42–44, 327–334.

¹⁸ Jonathan Grossman, "The Divinity Perception of Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin" [Hebrew], in *Al Derekh ha-Avot*, ed. A. Bazak et al. (Tevunot, 2001), 463, 473–474.

These interpretations indeed derive from R. Tzadok's writings, especially the one that stresses the fatalism of his doctrine. However, I would like to claim that the fact that R. Tzadok *also* stresses man's *Behira* can indicate a different stance that derives from his writings. The stress R. Tzadok puts upon fatalism derives from it being a great innovation to common sense, yet his complete doctrine and conflicting emphasis of *Behira* alongside *Yedi'a* can show that neither of these alone represent his final stance. According to such interpretation, the contradictions that rise from his writings with regard to Divine foreknowledge and free will (and with regard to other issues in general)¹⁹ are not a coincidental problem to be resolved but rather a significant core issue that R. Tzadok with his radical stance *strives for*. He introduces a *foundational paradox*, which is the bedrock of his magnum opus.

The Nature of R. Tzadok's Paradox

The original meaning of the concept of paradox in Greek is beyond (*para*) of thinking (*dokein*), that is, contrary to accepted opinion or expectation. In classical Greek it was meant to be something amazing, that is, to say something beyond mere conceptual contradiction, and from here the concept evolved also to the sense of miraculous. However, the paradox exists in varied contexts: logical, visual, psychological, rhetorical, and more. In philosophy, the meaning of the notion is a logical contradiction between two concepts. Some saw it as a sign of the invalidity of an argument or concept, but others saw it as a different way of thinking that deviates from formal logic and language limitations, enabling the dynamism and vitality resulting from reciprocity and the tension created between opposites—thus also opening a way for paradigmatic innovations. Some even see paradox as a higher form of achieving the truth, because it deviates from the linear line of thought when it involves metaphors and living images and does not settle for logical ideas. Paradox cannot be solved logically and therefore has to be raised beyond logic and actually needs to be lived: Paradox opens the gate to the daily experience itself, and makes the artistic work, poetic intuition, and religious experience accessible to thought.

Indeed, the paradox characterizes most of the religious conceptions of God, of the entirety or of the truth, which is described as the

¹⁹ See for example his discussion about Shabbat, whose sanctity is fixed by God's will since creation (*Yedi'a*), and other holidays, whose sanctity is determined by the people of Israel in their sanctification of the moon in the beginning of the month (*Behira*); *Peri Tzaddik*, vol. 4, 310, passage: *Rosh Hodesh Menahem Av* §2.

subject of various opposites, such as fullness-emptiness, transcendence-immanence, personal-impersonal, positive-negative, etc. To say that God is immanent-transcendent is not just to put those concepts side by side, but to describe the nature of the religious experience itself through the paradoxical language; religious thinkers often suspect the ability of other language to describe religious experience and truth.²⁰

In our context, the paradox is described by the fact that it simultaneously bears the contradictory opposites (*nesi'at hafakhim* in Hasidic nomenclature) and by a mutual influence of difficult (existentially or otherwise) yet fertile tension is achieved: on the one hand, the absolute Divine *Yedi'a* does not annul human *Behira*—whose nature is not absolute and fixed, inevitable and necessary, but relative and random, possible and transient, coincidental and contingent; rather, the supernal *Yedi'a* gives the human *Behira* essential existence and actuality *as such* (as contingent). On the other hand, *Behira* (in its wide sense as contingency) adds dynamism to the static completeness of absolute *Yedi'a*. As we shall see, like R. Leiner, R. Tzadok maintains a fatalistic approach according to which “All is in the hands of Heaven” and that God’s will determines the root of man’s soul by being revealed in it and thus gives meaning to man’s contingent actions. Yet, since absolute Divine control might deprive the meaning of man’s actions and contingent existence, R. Tzadok, unlike R. Leiner, alternatively claims there can be a deviation from this root, in which man’s actions are what determine his root and even affect the different worlds.

The two factors—*Yedi'a* and *Behira*—exist in R. Tzadok’s paradoxical doctrine simultaneously without annulling each other and with mutual influence. However, in order to understand the nature of the

²⁰ For all the discussions in the paragraphs above see: Michiko Yosa, “Paradox and Riddle” in *Encyclopedia of Religions*, ed. L. Jones (Macmillan Reference, 2005), vol. 10, 6988–6991; Roy Sorensen, “Epistemic Paradox,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemic-paradoxes>); John Valk, “The Concept of the *Coincidentia Oppositorum* in the Thought of Mircea Eliade” *Religious Studies* 28:1 (1992), 31–36.

Most scholars use the term “coincidence of opposites” to describe the position of various thinkers that hold paradoxical thinking. Nevertheless, here a more accurate term might be “harmony between the opposites,” which dispels the tension between the poles in some higher mystical dimension. Certain positions influenced by the Hegelian dialectic claimed a dialectical unity between the opposites, but ultimately lead to the assimilation of the contingent pole in the absolute pole; in so doing, these positions created a fatalism that cancels one side of the contradiction, or at least a synthesis that weakens it. In contrast, the concept of paradox that I use preserves the power of both opposed sides, their existence together and their mutual influence, which creates a difficult yet fertile tension.

paradox, we must not forget that it cannot be claimed that *Behira* has the same (absolute) status as *Yedi'a*, because if *Behira* is as absolute as *Yedi'a*, it would be, in fact, subsumed in its totality and thus effectively voided by it, thereby abolishing the paradox. Hence, although ontologically absolute *Yedi'a* is certainly preferable to contingent *Behira*, nevertheless, the former does not annul the latter and they exist simultaneously with mutual influence. Conversely, the contingent additions and innovations that *Behira* adds to *Yedi'a* do not annul *Yedi'a*, damage it, or reveal the preferability of *Behira*, as they are known to absolute Divine foreknowledge (*Yedi'a*) in advance. However, since Divine knowledge is fundamentally different from human knowledge and cognizance, it does not annul free will and therefore, it does not cause *Behira* to cease innovating and adding to *Yedi'a* substantially.

We shall discuss *Behira* and its different aspects, because the work done up until now by scholars focused primarily on what R. Tzadok has to say about *Yedi'a* and with not enough emphasis on the importance of *Behira*. In this context it is important to note that one cannot expect each and every passage of R. Tzadok's writing to contain the paradox. This would miss the inherent dynamism of the paradox, which derives from the structured contradiction and its fertile tension.

As Liwer has shown,²¹ R. Tzadok's writings are full of contradictions—such as the one between *Yedi'a* and *Behira*—and since these contradictions appear in all his writings and sometimes even in the same homily, they cannot be solved by attributing each of the contradicting statements to a different historical-biographical stage and claim there is a conceptual development in his doctrine. Thus, each side of the contradiction need be valid itself—R. Tzadok himself states that his doctrine, which associatively jumps from one notion to another, is not fixed and its concepts change according to the context and the content.²² Yet, presenting the contradicting models in and of themselves, with no attempt to settle them (bipolarity), as Liwer presented, does not permit an understanding of the significance of R. Tzadok's contradictory presentation of them. Instead, a different model that weaves through R. Tzadok's complete doctrine must be presented: the paradoxical model that derives from the presentation itself of the contradicting models, which reveals this as the central theme of his doctrine.

²¹ Liwer, *Tora*, 2–10. See there for other solutions that are also not compatible with R. Tzadok's writings.

²² *Dover Tzedek* (Har Beracha Institute, 2008), 271, section 4, *Aharei Mot* §229.

I do not imply that there is a harmonious and coherent description of R. Tzadok's doctrine; neither do I claim an unchanging attitude on his part throughout the years. Instead, I aim to explain the significance of the different, infinite aspects of the paradox. The structured nature of the paradox which bears contradictory elements is one of self-negation, self-dismantling, and reconstruction, which is not only a *means* for understanding the truth but also for spiritual transcendence—and in this sense, the paradox is the *end*. In any case, although what is presented here is one, general model, which cuts through all of R. Tzadok's writings (and thus absolute like the *Yedi'a*), it is not a fixed, dogmatic model but rather one with a variety of sub-models that contradict one another; therefore, it is dynamic and of creative development (and thus contingent like the *Behira*), which even establishes the essence of the paradox.

Thus, not only is it *impossible* to resolve the contradictions, but R. Tzadok strives *to sustain* the paradox with its contradictions. While R. Tzadok aims to clarify the paradox—or more precisely, the *structured incomprehensibility* of the paradox (and the causes for it)—the logical structure of the language does not permit the expression of the paradox. This retains the dialectical nature of the writing in that different elements are emphasized at different points. In other cases, R. Tzadok's associative style or his habit of leaving certain essays unfinished prevents the full presentation of both sides. Hence, his frequent repetitions and contradictions and the dispersing of his ideas among different books, without obvious chronological development. These factors, as well as the research required to present his doctrine by cutting his circular arguments at a certain point, which by itself caused an over-emphasis of that point, led to the common mistaken conclusion that he emphasized *Yedi'a* over *Behira*.

The Paradox of the "Hidden Root"

A key issue through which to view R. Tzadok's paradoxical approach can be found in his discussions on the "Hidden Root." The theological struggle of medieval scholastics with Divine foreknowledge and human free will transformed in the writings of the Izbica Hasidism into an existential question:²³ In a time of enlightenment and progressiveness, which emphasizes human autonomy (*Behira*) releasing itself from the chains of metaphysics (*Yedi'a*), R. Leiner specifically emphasized the importance of absolute Divine will (*Yedi'a*). He insisted that man's contingent actions

²³ As often happens in Hasidic interpretation in general and to Kabbalah in specific; see Gershom Scholem, *Devarim be-Go* (Am Oved, 1976), vol. 2, 325.

are not arbitrary, they are subject to God's providence and will. As we saw, his approach expresses religious existentialism, which strives *to reveal* the inner authentic "subject"—the revelation of God's will in man's heart and his individualistic unique existence, replacing the rationalistic and idealistic strive for the objective truth of external reality. This revelation gives man the autonomous freedom to deviate from the fixed laws of nature and of society and exist (or worship God) according to an inner directive (or God's will, which is revealed in his heart)—unique to this man, specifically here and now.²⁴

Such autonomy gives man a certain extent of freedom; yet, existential-religious autonomy is nothing but fatalism in which man acts according to the predetermined "Root of the Soul" (or authentic "subject").²⁵

As we saw, R. Tzadok continues the existentialistic fatalism of his rabbi, since the claim that "All is in the hands of Heaven," all actions and even sins (and, he even ascribes to his rabbi that thoughts, too, before they were created are in the hands of Heaven), appears in his writings explicitly and implicitly; in addition, R. Tzadok explicitly maintains the existence of an affixed "Root of the Soul" that determines man's nature and actions:

All Israel are attached to God... by their *root* of the Patriarchs... that is *fixed* in the heart of every one of Israel... [a root which] cannot be annulled... since it is *fixed* and endures even if he increases sins.²⁶

Although choice is given to man, man cannot be changed in his root, as the Sages said in *Sanhedrin* (44a): "An Israelite, although he has sinned – he is Israel," because he is from a holy root and trunk. And it also said in *Berakhot* (29a): "'Good does not turn bad'... and also the opposite: 'bad does not turn good.'"²⁷

However, as we saw, the identification of R. Tzadok's doctrine as a continuation of R. Leiner's doctrine is incongruent with R. Tzadok's many sayings in which he intensifies human *Behira* and its creativity, and his assertion that is adjacent to the claim about the "affixed root" that

²⁴ *Mei ha-Shilo'ah*, vol. 1, 159. See Cohen, *Toda'a*, 40–46.

²⁵ See R. Shimon Gershon Rosenberg (Shagar), *Kelim Shevurim – Torah ve-Tzionut Datit be-Seviva Postmodernit* (Yeshivat Si'ah Yitzhak, 2004), 50–51. In his conception this type of autonomy is liberty (*herut*), in contrast to 'full freedom' (*hofesh*).

²⁶ *Likkutei Ma'amarim*, 81, 11:28, see also 45, 8:3; *Yisrael Kedoshim*, 141, 10:12; and many more.

²⁷ *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, 57, §130.

actions *do not reveal* but rather *determine and establish* that root. In the same passage, he says:

But this *root* is *hidden* from all creatures (and this is the secret of Divine foreknowledge and free choice with which the ancients had difficulties) because “the heart does not reveal to the mouth” [*Kohélet Rabba* 12:10]... and he becomes evil through his own bad act and choice, and also the opposite: by virtue of repentance and good deeds he could grow closer [to God]... and it is said (Psalms 51:12): “Create me a pure heart, O God,” and creation is *ex nihilo*. That is to say that because this is in the hand of God the mercy of Heaven is effective (and when He will grant the mercy or the opposite, God forbid, then his root will really be like that retroactively...).²⁸

This and other assertions²⁹ seem to indicate that R. Tzadok is not satisfied with the existential justification of Divine providence overlooking all contingent actions but strives for the existential justification of human free will that is beyond the “affixed root.” How can both contradictory statements stand together in the same passage?

It seems that this contradiction in R. Tzadok’s writings is not an expression of a dialectic arising from one stage to another, in which each stage eliminates the previous one until the recognition that “All is in the hands of Heaven”; rather, it is an expression of holding both poles simultaneously.

Moreover, this holding is not totally bipolar, since the poles interact; this is a *paradox* (which is dialectically expressed only due to the limitations of language), which regarding man’s existential essence and the layers of his soul, R. Tzadok calls the “Hidden Root” (*Shoresheh Ne’elam*), whose source lies in the *Sefirat Keter* which is also called *Ayin*:

Because even if he increases in making transgressions to anger God, the root of God’s love... parallel to the [Divine] virtue *Keter*, which is *the hidden root* of the thought, there [the root of Divine love] does not disconnect at all.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See, for example, *Dover Tzedek*, 163-164, section 4, passage *Abarei Mot* §56-57.

³⁰ *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, 102, §196. Liwer, *Yesodot*, 143-145, did not distinguish between the affixed root and the hidden root, and describes them both as fatalistic elements which determine man’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. Like in other discussions in R. Tzadok’s doctrine, though presenting paradoxes, she claims that eventually he strives for a fatalistic revelation of God; see for example her discussion about *Yehida*, *ibid.*, 115.

The depth of the beginning of the thought [*Keter*, the Divine will] is not clear in this world... that the depth of the beginning is called Nothingness [*Ayin*], because the thought [the second Sefira, *Hokhma*] is called *Yesh* [something/exist], where it is already some existence sensed by man, the thought about what he thinks; and it is *ex nihilo* [*Yesh* from *Ayin*], that is to say from the depth of the beginning that is hidden from man's eye, and [*Ayin*] is like it does not exist at all... that he will acknowledge how his *root* is attached to this *hidden* light.³¹

These concepts indicate the holding of the contradictory poles which creates a fertile tension between them: on the one hand, the *Yedi'a* of the "affixed root," whose source is in *Sefirat Bina*³² (*yesh*) gives essential existence and actuality to the contingency of the *Behira* (which parallels *Sefirat Malkhut*) and its *exposure* reveals the essence that motivates the actions that are of man's choice, yet without eliminating the *Behira* or its contingent and dynamic characteristic.

On the other hand, the contingent *Behira* establishes the affixed root of the *Keter* and *Ayin* in a way that influences man's essence and also in the *Sefirot* and worlds under them and adds, so to speak, novelty and dynamism to the permanent completeness of the *Yedi'a*—yet does not eliminate it, since even when it deviates from it, the *Behira* continues to absorb from it its existential essence and actuality.

R. Tzadok does not strive for infinity that eliminates finiteness and pushes man into the world to come or have him disappear when facing it, but for infinity that includes finiteness itself; this infinity is the paradoxical one, which specifically reinforces the finite and the existence in this world, and its disappearance is part of its essence, so much so that even during its concrete future revelation it will remain concealed and hidden:

And it was said [Jer. 50:20]: "In that day [should read: In those days] search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none," etc., because in this world there are transgressions, because he cannot become purified in it, only "In that day," that is to say, that there is a day (hinting to something clear [as opposed to the darkness of the night]) which is called

³¹ *Dover Tzedek*, 157, section 4, *Aharei Mot* §45. R. Tzadok does not necessarily use this term in organized, conscious and critical conceptualization—yet, a close reading of his words might unveil its centrality.

³² "All Israel has a portion [*helek*] in the world to come' [*Sanhedrin* 10:1]... the world to come is *Bina* and 'Bina – heart' [*Tikkunei Zohar* 17a], since in this world it is the usage of the forces of action [the lower seven *Sefirot*; *Behira*], and the world to come is parallel only to the heart [the eighth *Sefira*, *Bina*; *Yedi'a*]" (*Likkutei Ma'amarim*, 43, 7:1).

“that,” meaning: the *hidden* gate which is called “that,” which hints at the *concealed*, will be opened. And on that day God... will illuminate with the *hidden* light on man.³³

The root spoken of here is indeed an absolute one, yet it is concealed in its essence since paradoxically it is determined by the contingent actions.

This root is Israel’s devotion to the paradoxical and dynamic Divine infinity, to the *Ayin* which is Israel’s fate that exists above the gentiles’ predetermined and essentialist fate (astrology):

“There is no [*Ein*] fortune for Israel” (*Shabbat* 156a), meaning that the virtue of Nothingness [*Ayin/Ein*]*—Atika* [*Kadisha*, the ancient holy one, *Keter*] which is *hidden* and is called Nothingness [*Ayin*] as stated in the holy Zohar (II, 64b)—is the fortune of Israel, and that is to say that they are attached to the *root*.³⁴

The Nothingness [*Ayin*] is the fortune of Israel... but... the idolaters... under the control of fortune, which is the zodiac of the sky.... But fortune of Man [Israel] to save him from bad injuries, that is only by the “*Ein Mazal*” [*Ayin*] of Israel.³⁵

This root is also “the portion (*helek*) in the world to come,”³⁶ which brings us back to the existential question of human condition: the question of coping with the challenges of evil, be it the evil done *to* man in torments or the evil done *by* him in sin. In regard to sin, this portion is on the one hand absolute (*Yedi’a*) and all Israel have such a portion due to the fact that they belong to the Jewish nation—yet on the other hand, its essence is the free establishment of the root (*Behira*). This is not necessarily a guarantee of the goodness of Israel despite their bad deeds, but a guarantee that the possibility of repentance and rectification which are given to free will (*Behira*) will always exist (whereas to the gentile nations, who believe in a predetermined fate, that possibility does not always exist).

³³ *Dover Tzedek*, 157, section 4, *Abarei Mot* §45. The word “that” in Hebrew (*ha-hu*) also refers to the third person form: he; R. Tzadok emphasizes the concealed dimension of this form, which links to paradoxical *Keter*, as opposed to the second person: you (*ata*), which links to *Sefirat Tiferet*.

³⁴ *Peri Tzaddik*, vol. 2, 199, *Rosh Hodesh Adar* §5.

³⁵ *Mahshavot Harutz*, 64–65, 8:32; see also 124, 15:14; *Resisei Layla*, 95–96, 43:1.

³⁶ See fn. 32.

Conclusion

The theological question of the medieval rabbis regarding “Divine foreknowledge and human free will” had gone through an existential transformation in the Izbica Hasidic court, which deals with it through the perspective of man’s Divine root of soul. But while R. Leiner posited a fatalistic position, according to which all man’s actions are determined by the Divine will which is revealed in man’s heart and soul—it seems that R. Tzadok, his student, posits a paradox. This paradox—which is the main objective of R. Tzadok’s discussion, directly and indirectly, in content and form—holds the two opposites in their full strength and with mutual influence between them, which creates a difficult, yet fertile tension: on the one hand, absolute *Yedi’a*, which indeed is revealed in man’s fixed root of soul, gives existential significance to man’s contingent condition (*Behira*), when even his sins and torments are revealed as the will of God and as part of His comprehension:

The significance of the issue is that the higher repentance—repentance out of love—is not an acknowledgment of responsibility for the sin and the return from it, but precisely the disengagement from this [repetition], a result of the insight “that all he sinned was also the will of God” [*Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, 14, §40].... The repentance is to accept yourself even as a sinner, out of the enlightenment that it was not me who made myself but God.... The base of the repentance is the belief of “besides him there is no other” [Deuteronomy 4:35]. The principle is simple: From an absolute Divine perspective “there is no place vacant of him” [*Tikkunei Zohar* 91b], “darkness is as light” [Ps. 139:12] to Him... just as His praise rises from heaven so too it rises from hell. The choice, and following it also the concept of sin, belong to a lower world, but meaningless in the zone of the Divine substance. Overcoming sin, which is repentance out of love, is the ability and willingness of man to reach this recognition and accept it... not only the content of repentance does not depend on man, but also the repentance act itself.³⁷

On the other hand, contingent *Behira* also gives existential significance to man’s condition: “This freedom imposes a huge responsibility—‘the matter depends on no one but me’” (*Avoda Zara* 17a); you should not evade the freedom and impose the responsibility on someone else. The

³⁷ R. Shagar, *Shuvi Nafshi – Hesed o Herut* (Yeshivat Si’ah Yitzhak, 2003), 126–127, 129.

acknowledgment of freedom itself is man's motivation to take responsibility for himself and for the world."³⁸ This is so because:

The extraction of this apprehension, which teaches that everything is in the hands of Heaven, does not necessarily bring about the conclusion that man cannot but accept himself and his fate. The assertion according to which everything man does is predetermined may also release man to free activity which accepts its power from this belief precisely. One who believes in it can act freely; moreover, he is rest assured he cannot do otherwise and that this is God's will... precisely the fatalistic approach may bring about vigorous endeavor. The significance of that is that man can and even must act according to his free choice; after all the authenticity, his ability to internally change and identify with his actions, does not depend on him, and indeed it is in the hands of Heaven and appears as inspiration and revelation.³⁹

Man is not a pawn in the hands of God. The revelation of His will does not actually eliminate the value of man's actions, sins, and torments, since they too have an essential existence and actuality as such, as contingent. Hence, since man's contingent actions received their essential existence and actuality, they are those who determine and even change the essence of his root of the soul—the Hidden Root. Moreover, the rectification of man's contingent sin and torments can even add, so to speak, to the fixed Divine absoluteness (the *Yedi'a*, which indeed foreknows and includes them in advance, yet without annulling their being a substantive addition and innovation) and influence both the upper worlds and this world.

Afterthought: R. Tzadok and Nietzsche

A week and a half before R. Tzadok's death in 1900, another great thinker died—Friedrich Nietzsche. Coming from remote intellectual and cultural backgrounds and unaware of one another, the two did not share any sources of influence, besides, perhaps, some vague *zeitgeist*. Nevertheless, the philosophy of the two in regard to our discussion holds some surprising similarities. In the following, I wish to point at these similarities, and draw attention to some significant differences. While I do not imply any historical connection between R. Tzadok and Nietzsche, nor suggest a new understanding of the latter's thought, I seek to use Nietzsche's view (at least as it has been understood by some scholars of

³⁸ Ibid., 128.

³⁹ Ibid., 132–133.

Nietzsche's doctrine and some of his post-structural successors), to illuminate R. Tzadok's view of the aforementioned paradox.

Two of Nietzsche's essential ideas are equivalent to *Yedi'a* and *Behira*, and, furthermore, the relation between them is paradoxical. The first idea, which parallels *Yedi'a*, is Nietzsche's concept of "eternal recurrence" referring to the idea that all events repeat themselves through eternal cycles. According to Nietzsche, when one recognizes this, one's reaction should be an embracing—even love—of one's fate (*amor fati*). This seems to express a fatalistic approach. The second idea, on the other hand, seems to stress *Behira*. It is his notion of the *Übermensch*—the superior status to which man must strive. Nietzsche portrays the *Übermensch* as a self-made man who, in light of God's "death," overcomes earthly obstacles and limitations—and even overrides the moral distinction between good and evil—by his creative and interpretive strength, as he seeks to fulfill his will for power and replaces God. On the face of it, this seems like an extreme description of human agency—of *Behira*, in which man achieves absolute freedom.

The two concepts ostensibly contradict each other, and, in fact, several interpretations were offered to try to reconcile this apparent discrepancy, claiming one of the poles is not essential to Nietzsche.⁴⁰ A different approach, however, sees the relation between the two bipolar notions as a paradox similar to the one attributed above to R. Tzadok.⁴¹ It holds that precisely embracing fate is what enables the highest degree of fulfillment of the Nietzschean "will to power." The reason is twofold: on the one hand, the eternal recurrence exempts man from responsibility and accountability to his actions (since these actions have already been happening forever and will continue to do so eternally) and therefore man is free to do as he pleases. On the other hand, the recurrence confirms man's deeds by engraving the temporary and fleeting actions into infiniteness.

The similarities can thus be summarized in the following generalizations:

⁴⁰ See Ran Sigad, *Existentialism – Hemshekh u-Mifne be-Toldot ha-Tarbut ha-Ma'aravit* (Mosad Bialik, 1975) [Hebrew], 72–73; Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching* (Yale University Press, 1986); Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴¹ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton University Press, 1974), 307, 319–320, 322–326; Rogério Miranda de Almeida, *Nietzsche and Paradox* (State University of New York Press, 2006).

1. Both see the “subject” (Nietzsche)⁴² or “The Root of the Soul” (R. Tzadok) as a limiting factor for man’s freedom and thus claim that actions do not *reveal* but rather *establish* the individual and his free subject/Root.⁴³
2. Both deduce this from a paradoxical position existing in the tension between *Behira*, including not only choice but also self-creation and freedom, and *Yedi’a*, in the form of determinism or fatalism.⁴⁴
3. This is so, since for both, fatalism does not limit man because when man accepts his fate, the very acceptance gives his free (and, in the sense used above, contingent) actions the power to create himself and his world (and, for R. Tzadok, the upper worlds too).
4. For both, this creation reflects the will and power that go beyond good or evil (a sin for the sake of heaven [*avera lishmah*] in R. Tzadok’s concepts,⁴⁵ or his understanding of the nature of sin as God’s will), and parallels (or, according to Nietzsche, replaces) the Divine creation.

Yet despite the similarity, there are important differences. While Nietzsche not only denies the concept of objective truth but also its subjective equivalent—the authenticity of the “Subject”—R. Tzadok indeed deviates from them but does not deny them. He does not argue for the elimination of the absolute dimension—the death of the “subject,” of metaphysics, and of God. Nor does he seek God’s replacement by the *Übermensch*. Rather, R. Tzadok claims that the objective Divine truth or

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), vol. 1, 14, §12; 17, §17; *The Will to Power* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 267, §481: “‘Everything is subjective,’ you say; but even this is interpretation. The ‘subject’ is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is. – Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis.” Ibid., 270, §490.

⁴³ Post-structural theoreticians continued this notion stressing “the death of the ‘subject.’” See for instance: Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Cornell University Press, 1980), 113–139; Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” in *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. H. Abelow, et al., (Routledge, 1993), 307–320; and see below fn. 46.

⁴⁴ While R. Tzadok’s religious approach is clearly fatalistic, Nietzsche’s is more difficult to define. It may be considered either as determinism if the “eternal recurrence” is understood as a natural, “scientific” cycle (see Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 325–326), or as fatalism, if considering Nietzsche’s hedonistic-polytheistic approach to fate, e.g., Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols – Or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer* (Hackett Publication, 1997), 91: “I, the final follower of the philosopher Dionysus—I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence.” For a discussion of determinism and monotheistic or polytheistic fatalism, see Zur, *Paradox*, 55–68.

⁴⁵ See for example *Takanat ha-Shavin*, 22–28, 5:1–11.

the authenticity of the subject (*Yedi'a*) give essential existence and actuality to man's contingent choices (*Behira*), thereby adding, so to speak, dynamism and renewal to the absolute Divinity, thus making man a partner (not a substitute) of God.

In this sense, R. Tzadok's paradox is broader (hence more paradoxical) than that of Nietzsche. While the latter's exists only in the human-physical domain—between fate, determinism, and *Behira*—the former's includes in addition to this domain the Divine-metaphysical domain, which contains a permanent unified and affixed root, but also an infinite dynamic aspect. While R. Tzadok's paradox lies between contingent *Behira* and absolute (monotheistic) *Yedi'a*, Nietzsche's paradox lies between contingent *Behira* and atheistic (or, as mentioned above, even polytheistic) fatalism or determinism—either of which is limited to this world and to the human domain, and hence similarly contingent. Therefore, Nietzsche's paradox ultimately collapses in on contingency itself and is prone to produce the aforementioned existential anxieties of insignificance and emptiness, and the ethical and social dangers of nihilism, hedonism, or suspiciousness.⁴⁶

Nietzsche noted that metaphysics (objective truth or the authenticity of the subject) wishes to release the human soul from the boundaries of the body and matter, yet in practice it imposes even greater limitations on human freedom, such as the essentialist and strict definitions of the nature of man or the subject. Nietzsche's objection to the essentialist absoluteness of metaphysics, however, is itself absolute and essentialist, when categorically it rejects any kind of metaphysics. Ultimately, then, Nietzsche holds onto contingency alone, which being completely coincidental collapses in on itself and actually returns to the same physical and finite limitations of freedom, to which Nietzsche himself objected.

R. Tzadok, in contrast, in his striving for the paradox of the *Keter* and the "Hidden Root," returns metaphysics into a spirituality beyond the limits of matter. To him, it is precisely the absolute metaphysics that releases human freedom: first it releases from limits of the body and matter and of the contingency of human action—to which it gives essential existence and actuality, but as such, as contingent. Second, the meta-

⁴⁶ See Philippa Foot, "Nietzsche's Immoralism" in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, ed. R. Schacht (University of California Press, 1994), 7–13. These dangers may be derived from Nietzsche's relativism, as some post-structural successors of his doctrine interpreted it; e.g., Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Pantheon, 1984), 76–100. However, in their point of view, this relativism has a desired positive ethical and social potential since it is a source of humbleness, creativity, and pluralism.

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physics releases from the spiritual limitations of the metaphysical “affixed root,” when man deviates the absoluteness of *Yedi’a* (but *does not* deny it), and thus establishes his “Hidden Root” with his actions (*Behira*) for better or for worse, and even adds, so to speak, to the *Yedi’a* with his creative innovations regarding the Oral Law and in general.