

# Free Will

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, he had no choice. It wasn't fair. I have often heard this said. But what do we mean when we talk about God hardening a person's heart? Maybe it just means that God allows people to make bad decisions. The Torah uses popular language without going into philosophical detail.

We are used to an idea of freedom, that we are responsible for our actions and that is why in our societies we punish people who break the law. However, freedom does not mean that there is no compulsion, that there is nothing influencing us. Or that one is completely free of any kind of constraint. Let's just mention our genes. Some people just seem to have better genes than others. Some seem to be naturally better people than others or more religious and have always been so since birth. Why is that? Why do siblings born into the very same family and brought up equally often turn out so different?

We know about the debate between Nature and Nurture. What influences a person most? One's nature, one's genes, or the way one was educated and brought up? I don't think there is just one answer. Lots of different things affect how we think and behave.