

## Choice and Freewill - Part 1 of 3

Everyday we're confronted with conflicting messages. These messages force us into fear and submission, hate and intolerance, complacency and hopelessness, or into developing a strong faith in our own inner voice. This inner message is our direct link to the creator and it exists to guide our decisions and choices. Most outside messages appear to give us choices but come with hidden agendas. Because not everyone believes that we have the right to make choices using our own freewill, these messengers try to subvert the process using manipulation.

Choice is a polarizing issue today. Choice means many things to many people and it promotes much heated debate, but what we really get from the debate is anything but a freewill pronouncement to make our own choices. Webster's Dictionary definition for choice is "to select freely after consideration, followed by: to have a preference for, to decide, to make a selection, or to take an alternative." Just trying to select a working definition of choice creates additional polarization because it asks us to consider personal preference and alternatives, both controversial issues, especially today.

Freewill means making a voluntary choice or decision. It is defined as "the freedom of humans to make choices that are not determined by prior causes or by divine intervention." What then would connect us to God in our choices if not divine intervention? The ancient Hebrew Midrash tradition suggests an open and liberal translation when defining and interpreting events that lead to choices in our lives; one which leaves us open to both divine guidance and freewill. Freewill is the path to our God-self where, rather than through outside intervention, we have a direct line through our own inner voice.

Freewill is always a choice and cannot possibly be given or taken away by interventionists and authoritarian manipulators. However, cultures that try to restrict choice and freewill sadly exist in the world today. Third-world countries powered by dictators and theocrats, as well as our own U.S., are being run by fear, intimidation and limitation as a means to control the masses. Fundamentalist societies-- those particularly intolerant of each other, of women, and of educational institutions that promote free-thought and knowledge quests--continue to exist. They use intimidating messages to expand their power around the world, and attempt to restrict freewill and choice by forcing their own style and flavor of religion, dogma, and government on the public, either overtly or covertly.

Additionally, we restrict our own choices by imposing our own individual sets of limitations and fears upon ourselves. These stand in the way of our making responsible life decisions.

Most choices, however, are largely manipulated through the messages we deal with everyday. The most invasive messages are the doom and gloom messages that we largely view through T.V. War, famine, natural disasters, unemployment, plagues, rape, violence—all are behavior manipulators that focus on the negative and on the hardships and tragedies of life. They keep us emotionally desolate and out of touch with our spirit. They also repress us by making us too despondent to move beyond or above the awfulness of the events. Watching the news everyday can make us depressed, angry, enraged, and eventually numb, if we do not have some way of channeling our negative emotions constructively or finding some reason behind the madness.

Our choices are also manipulated through polarizing and divisive messages largely via advertising (commercial and political) and junk mail. These are meant to heavily sway our personal opinions. These divisive messages include product choice, school choice, medical choice, reproductive choice, parental rights, children's rights, gay rights, workers rights, civil rights, and religious rights.

Polarizing messages, especially, make us angry as they attempt to manipulate us into choosing sides on very complex issues that we watch everyday on the news. According to these messengers, there are never any grey areas.

As a whole, the ad industry, the media, and those in authority use messaging to keep us in internal conflict and want. Resultingly, if we're too despondent to resolve the conflict (if we were ever able to define it in the first place), then the authoritarian figures such as politicians, priests, parents, teachers, police, employers, and sometimes even the doctors attempt to use this conflict to further manipulate or restrict our choices. So, all of these messages are a first attempt to try to control our choices and opinions. They are designed to redefine our lives and some are further covertly designed to restrict our choices through sensory and cognitive manipulation.

The more oppressive authoritarian messages, which are the social, cultural, religious, and political messages, tell us to live by certain rules, not to question authority, obey our elders, follow by example, be a role model, accept blindly, and go by the book. These are the trickiest messages of all because many are necessary to promote law and order. For example, the commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill, is an authoritarian and divine message we redefine every time we get into divisive arguments about war, abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty and gun control. Certainly, law and order are important if we are to live together but where do we draw the line in determining life and death choices?

Authoritarian messages tell us to hear what THEY want you to hear, to learn what THEY want you to learn, to see what THEY want you to see, to speak what THEY want you to speak, and to know what THEY want you to know. As a result, we feel out of control and confused about our choices. Most of us react negatively or develop a complacency and resignation about life. We accept restrictions and many times impose them on ourselves to the extent of blocking our own inner voice, rather than trying to protect our spiritual and divine right to freewill and choice.

We have a divine right to choose. Our choices must not be limited, restricted or mandated just because some special or more powerful group wants us to play by their rules and wants to restrict our choices in favor of theirs. It is up to each of us, individually, to choose the source of our guiding messenger: will it be our own inner voice, or those who would dictate our choices for us?

(Next month: Part 2)