

Ari Barak, a mischievous ADHD teenager, meets up with the brainy Howard Segal in a yeshiva with a difference. What is Rabbi White's secret? Can Ari and Howard solve the paradox of free will? And how will they clean up the mess they've made of the history of the world?

Ari Barak and the Free-Will Paradox

by Shaul Behr

**Order the complete book from the publisher
[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9444.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

ARI BARAK

AND THE FREE-WILL PARADOX



Copyright © 2017 Shaul Behr
<http://shaulbehr.com>

Cover illustration by Carlo Marco Alfonso
bhepin@gmail.com

ISBN: 978-1-63492-500-6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2017

First Edition

Ya'alili Copyright © 2011 8th Day. Lyrics reproduced with permission

PROLOGUE

The old rabbi lay propped up with pillows on his deathbed, smiling serenely. His children and several of his older grandchildren were gathered around. Tears glistened in their eyes. Tears of laughter.

“Abba¹, you really are unbelievable,” wheezed Gavriel, his eldest son, recovering long enough from his conniptions to speak. He himself was in his late sixties. “One might think that when a nonagenarian *gadol hador*² passes away, he might do it gracefully, with gravitas and maybe some deep wisdom in his parting words. But you’ve done nothing but have us splitting our sides for the last half hour!”

“Good,” pronounced the old man in a creaky voice. “If there should be anything that you will remember me by, it’s that I was never too old to have a sense of humor.”

“But Abba,” protested his daughter Avigail, “you should rest! Aren’t you in pain? Can’t I give you some painkillers?”

“Of course I’m in pain!” replied her father. “The cancer is consuming me. I can feel the *Beis Din shel Maala*³ calling me. But you think I should spend my last few minutes in this world drugged out, unable to feel, think, or be present with those I

¹ Daddy.

² Literally, “a Great One of the generation,” a term reserved for only the most senior, learned and saintly Rabbis.

³ The Heavenly Court, which judges a person after his death.

love? *Chas veshalom*!⁴ The pain is temporary!” He winced. “But this time now is irreplaceable!”

He turned to another of his sons. “Speaking of which, Uriel, has the doctor arrived yet? I need to speak to him.”

“I’ll check, Abba.” He shuffled over to the door and poked his head outside, then called back in. “Yes, Abba, he’s here. Shall I bring him in?”

“No, I think he’s quite capable of walking in by himself,” called back the old rabbi drily. His offspring burst out laughing again, several wiping their eyes as the uproar died down.

In walked a thin, neat man of around sixty. He surveyed the gathering with a wry smile. “Well, this certainly is the most cheerful farewell I’ve ever seen. But laughter is the best medicine, after all, isn’t it? Rebbe⁵, you sent for me?”

“Yes, Doctor, I did. I have something important to tell you that is for your ears only.”

A curious and awkward silence descended over the room. The old man looked around at his family. “I’m sorry, am I slurring my speech? I said, what I have to say now is for the doctor’s ears only. Go on, now.” He motioned feebly with his hand to usher everyone out.

“But...Abba...” protested Gavriel.

“Oh, *feh*, don’t worry.” He waved dismissively. “I’ll keep myself alive until you get back. Trust me, you’ll get your chance

⁴ Heaven forbid!

⁵ Rebbe is a term used to address one’s personal teacher, as distinct from rabbi, which is a more general, objective term.

to say good-bye. But now I must have private words with the doctor.”

Reluctantly, his offspring trudged out of the room and closed the door behind themselves. The doctor sat himself in an upright chair near the head of the bed.

“I knew you would come,” said the aged rabbi.

“It was fortunate that I was able to be here now. I just got back from speaking at a conference in London, and only have a day at home now before the next one in Singapore.”

“And yet, I knew with complete certainty that I would see you again before I die. I cannot *allow* myself to die yet. Not until I have entrusted you with a sacred mission.”

The doctor leaned closer, brows furrowed. “A sacred mission, Rebbe?”

“Yes. I could be dramatic and say the whole world depends on it. But it doesn’t matter what I say, because I know you will do it anyway. And, all going well, you could even be back here before I shuffle off this mortal coil, to tell me you succeeded. But even if not, I know you will succeed.”

“Thank you for your confidence in me, Rebbe—I *think*.” The doctor raised an eyebrow. “What is this mission?”

“I wrote it down for you. Look in the top drawer of my bedside table. There’s an envelope there, addressed to you.”

The doctor obediently opened the drawer and found the envelope. He tore it open and scanned the note inside. As he read it, he blanched. His eyes widened in disbelief, and his jaw dropped.

“Rebbe...are you...serious? This is...quite, ah...how shall I say it? *Unexpected?*”

“Much of the time, my dear Doctor, I am not too serious. My cancer is very serious, so I do have to counterbalance it. But on this occasion, I am *dead* serious. Which is appropriate for someone who is soon to be seriously dead.”

The doctor shook his head, blinking, breathing deeply, coming to terms with his task and all it entailed. After about half a minute of reflection, he looked the dying man in the eyes. “Rebbe...you never told me...”

The old man nodded weakly, a smile playing on his lips. “It wasn’t necessary before. But it is true, and now you know what you have to do.”

“My wife...” the doctor mumbled, still in shock.

“You need to do this alone,” instructed the rabbi. “Mostly. The professor will help you as necessary. Don’t worry about your wife; she won’t miss you. You’ll be back within the hour, anyway, possibly sooner, depending on how good your aim is.” He gave a conspiratorial wink, then winced involuntarily in pain.

The doctor took a deep breath, composed himself, and stood up. “Of course I will do it, Rebbe. Right away.”

The old man’s face lit up. “Good man. I knew you would.”

“Apparently so,” replied the doctor drily.

“One more thing,” said the rabbi. “Please give me that little notepad and a pen.”

The doctor obeyed, holding the notepad upright in the old man's lap with one hand, and helping him grip the pen in the other. With limp movements, the dying rabbi scrawled a sentence on the pad, then tore off the page and handed it to the doctor with a mischievous smile.

The doctor accepted it with a raised eyebrow. "I could have made one myself, you know."

"I know," said the rabbi with a twinkle in his eye. "But I couldn't resist. By the time you get back you'll understand why."

"All right, I'll take your word for it," replied the doctor, folding the note along with his instructions and tucking them into his pocket. He turned as if to leave, then paused for a couple of seconds, took a deep breath and turned back. "Rebbe, this is an unbelievable honor for me. Of all your *talmidim*⁶, why me? I'm certainly not the biggest *talmid chacham*⁷..."

The rabbi smiled a knowing smile, but did not reply.

"Of course," said his student, divining the answer himself. "It has to be me. I understand. Well then, farewell for now. And thank you—for *everything*."

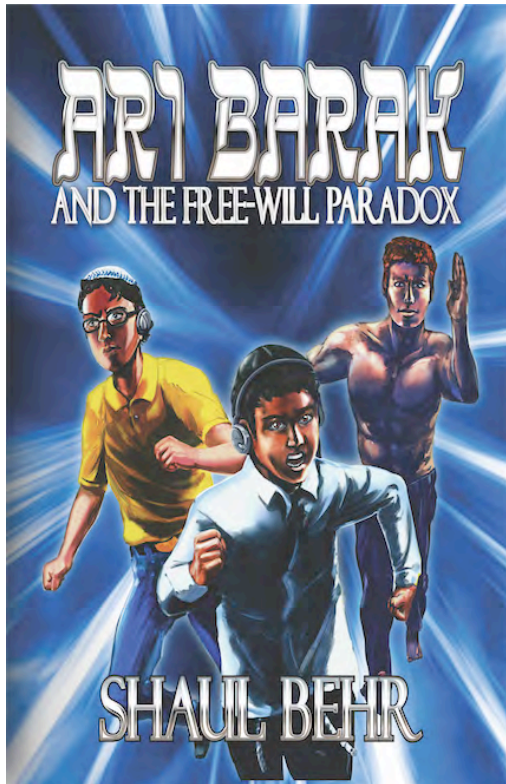
"No," said the old man. "Thank *you*. What you are about to do means my *life* to me."

⁶ Students.

⁷ Eminent student.

He held out his hand. As the doctor took it, the old man pulled him with surprising strength into a tight embrace. He only released his grip when the pain from his body forced him.

Without another word, the doctor bowed his head, then turned and strode purposefully from the room.



Ari Barak, a mischievous ADHD teenager, meets up with the brainy Howard Segal in a yeshiva with a difference. What is Rabbi White's secret? Can Ari and Howard solve the paradox of free will? And how will they clean up the mess they've made of the history of the world?

Ari Barak and the Free-Will Paradox

by Shaul Behr

**Order the complete book from the publisher
[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9444.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**