

DESTINY VS. HUMAN ACTION

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The interplay of Destiny and human action has fascinated philosophers and theologians ever since Adam and Chava were sent out of Gan Eden. Does G-d know what we are going to do before we do it, or doesn't He? If He does know, then free will doesn't exist; and if He doesn't know then He can't be G-d! In truth, although the question is a rich source for discussion, debate and creative analysis, it doesn't make much of a difference. We must function as individuals and a society who take full responsibility for all our decisions and subsequent actions. Our perspective is contained in the statement, "The end result is as G-d originally intended." Regardless of the decisions we make, history will realize its intended destiny. However, the journey toward destiny can be direct or indirect, as dictated by our individual and collective decisions. The continuing saga of Yakov and his family is an excellent example of history traveling a needlessly convoluted path in search of destiny. In the end, G-d's original intent will be accomplished; however, it will have been quite a trip getting there.

Hashem's (G-d's) intent is for all nations to live their lives according to His mitzvos (commandments). Esav and Yishmael will one day acknowledge the primacy of Yakov. They will accept our guidance in understanding their purposes for having been created in "G-d's image". Our job is to teach them, through word and example, what it means to serve Hashem. As teachers, we have been chosen to teach, and as teachers we must have greater instruction in the discipline we wish to convey. This is the why we are called the "Chosen People", and why we were given the Torah. However, especially with Esav, what is didn't have to be. We could have been one nation with a single goal, rather than historic adversaries struggling against each other for spiritual dominance. The story of Dina's travail in this weeks Parsha is an excellent illustration of what might have been.

As related in last weeks Parsha, Dina was Leah's seventh child. The Medresh says that, in truth, she should have been born to Rachel, and Yoseph should have been Leah's seventh son; however, Leah prayed that Yoseph should be born to Rachel so that Rachel would have at least as many sons as Bilhah and Zilpah. Hashem listened to Leah's Tefilos, and instead of giving birth to Yoseph, she gave birth to Dina.

We know from last weeks Parsha and this weeks Haftarah (Ovadia 1:18), that Yakov could not return to Canaan and confront Esav until Yoseph was born. Yakov, through purchasing the birthright and by marrying both Rachel and Leah, had assumed the dual roles of himself and Esav in the formation of the nation. Yoseph's birth and his unique potential to be a king of the non-Jewish world was the

element needed to complete the process of Esav being removed from having any part in the Jewish people. Yet, there was one last chance for Yakov to bring Esav "into the fold" and possibly ease history's path toward destiny. That last chance was Dina.

Leah had been Esav's intended bride. Yakov married Leah because he had to do both his own as well as Esav's part in forming the nation. Yoseph should have been Leah's son, but instead was born to Rachel. As Leah's intended son, he manifested the very best that Esav could have been. However; he was born to Rachel, and as such, wasn't complete in his manifestation of Esav's strength and potential goodness. Leah's contribution to the birth of Yoseph was missing. We are told that in preparing for his confrontation with Esav, Yakov, fearing that Esav would have succumbed to Dina's beauty and insisted on marrying her, hid Dina in a box. In doing so, Yakov eliminated the possibility of Dina's influencing Esav to repent his ways. We are told that Dina's travail with Shechem was a punishment for Yakov hiding her away from Esav. If Esav would have married Dina, the subsequent children would have contained the, as of yet, missing components of Esav & Leah that had not been realized in Yoseph, due to the fact that he was born to Rachel rather than Leah. These children would have been the means for injecting the missing traits back into the body of the nation. Instead, Esav was divorced from all contact and went his own way leaving history to seek other means for realizing the missing Esav - Leah connection.

In the aftermath of Dina's abduction, she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter. This daughter ended up in Egypt as the adopted daughter to Potiphar, Yoseph's first master. As we will learn in next weeks Parsha, Yoseph married this adopted daughter and had two sons, Menashe and Ephrayim. In the end, the missing component of Leah was united with the positive manifestation of Esav (Yoseph) through the marriage of Yoseph to Dina's daughter. However, the destiny toward which all history must still strive is Esav's eventual acceptance of Yakov's primacy in revealing humankind's purpose. This could have been avoided if Esav had chosen to be good rather than bad; if Yoseph had been born to Leah, rather than Rachel; and if Dina would have married Esav. So much for the interplay of destiny and human action!

Copyright © 1997 by [Rabbi Aron Tendler](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
