

# G-DLY INTERVENTIONS VS. HUMAN ACTIONS

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

Destiny is a complex formula that balances G-d's intentions against man's actions. The scope of G-d's intentions are timeless and all encompassing while man's actions are contained by the limits of time and circumstance. G-d's intentions are executed in a planned and focused manner, while man's actions are reactive and often misguided. G-d's full intentions will be realized at the end of time while man's actions are primarily responsible for delaying that end. This is the meaning of the verse in Lecha Dodi, "The end result is as He originally intended." In the end, regardless of what the human race did, does, and will do, G-d's original intent in creating a world filled with free willed humans, will be realized. The story of Moshe's birth and upbringing is a classic example of destiny's formula.

According to the Talmud (Sotah 12a), the birth of the Jewish Redeemer and his eventual demise through "water" (Hitting the rock to bring forth water, rather than speaking to it) had been foretold by the royal astrologers of Pharaoh's court. This resulted in Pharaoh decreeing that all male newborns were to be drowned in the Nile River, hoping that the Redeemer would also be killed. Pharaoh killed tens of thousands in order to destroy the one.

This terrible decree followed an earlier attempt on Pharaoh's part to enlist the Jewish midwives in a conspiracy to kill the male newborns at birth. The two midwives, Shifra and Pooah, were reputed to have been Yocheved and Miriam, mother and sister of Moshe. (Sotah 11b). It was partially because the midwives refused to participate in Pharaoh's conspiracy, that G-d rewarded them with being the purveyors of both the Redeemer's birth and Pharaoh's eventual demise. It is interesting to note that had Pharaoh been more direct and started with the royal decree of, "drown all male children" rather than attempting to enlist the help of the midwives, Yocheved and Miriam might not have had the opportunity to merit Moshe's birth.

One year before Moshe was to be born, Moshe's father Amram divorced his wife Yocheved. Because Amram and Yocheved were the two leading Jewish personalities, the Jews followed their lead and divorced their spouses. This was done in response to Pharaoh's decree to "drown all male children". The Talmud (Sotah 12b) explains Amram's reasoning. "Are we to labor at having and raising children for nothing"? He therefore divorced his wife in hope of guaranteeing that no other male children would be born.

Miriam, their 5 year old daughter, disagreed with her father's reasoning. "Dad, your decree is more severe than Pharaoh's! Pharaoh only decreed against the male newborn, your decree extends to all

children, both male and female!

Pharaoh's decree is only against souls living in this world, but at least the child is born, is killed, and his soul goes directly to the World to Come; but your decree guarantees that souls won't even have a chance of attaining the World to Come!

Being that Pharaoh is an evil man, there is no guarantee that G-d will allow his decree to be fulfilled; but you father are a Tzadik, and Hashem always fulfills the decrees of His Tzadikim!

The Talmud concludes that Amram listened to Miriam's arguments and remarried Yocheved. Once Amram remarried his wife, the rest of the Jews also remarried their wives and resumed having children. It was a result of Amram's and Yocheved's second marriage that Moshe, the redeemer, was conceived and born.

The Medresh (Ber. Rab. 1:2) relates that Yocheved's giving birth to Moshe had already been prophesied by Miriam. (The Talmud in Sotah (11b) offers this as another explanation as to why Miriam was called Pooah). Upon Moshe's birth, Amram kissed Miriam and said, "your prophecy has been fulfilled"! Upon Moshe's being placed in the Nile river, Yocheved tapped Miriam on the head in reprimand and said, And what will now be with your prophecy"?

Because Miriam had been reprimanded, she positioned herself by the edge of the river to see what would be the outcome of her prophecy.

The relationship between prophecy and destiny is very complex. On the one hand, prophecy tells us the "end result." On the other hand, it does not explain the steps that we must take to bring about its outcome. If we simply do nothing, the prophecy will be delayed until the necessary actions are taken that create the setting where the prophecy can be realized.

The mere fact that Miriam had prophesied that the redeemer would be born from her mother did not guarantee that Moshe would be born when Moshe was born. If Amram and Yocheved had not remarried, as per Miriam's argument, Moshe would not have been born. His birth might have had to wait another generation and he would have been the son of Miriam, or Aharon, and the grandson of Yocheved. If that had been the case, redemption would have been delayed with far less Jews to save! As it was we are told that only 1/5 of the Jews were redeemed from Egypt, and even that was just in the nick of time!

After Amram and Yocheved remarried and Moshe was born, Moshe's life was still in grave danger. Pharaoh's astrologers still sensed the impending birth of the Jewish Redeemer. Therefore, Pharaoh was still drowning newborn males in his attempt to snuff out the Redeemer's young life. Amram and Yocheved put Moshe into the Nile and the astrologers then informed Pharaoh that the Redeemer had been born and that he had been "put" into the Nile. (Ber.Rab. 1:21). The decree was abolished, Moshe was thought to be dead and was therefore safe from Pharaoh. However, Miriam's prophecy was still not guaranteed.

What would have happened if the basket had tipped over and Moshe would have drowned? What would have happened if some Egyptian peasant would have found the abandoned child and turned him in to the authorities as an obvious Jewish child? (he had a Bris Milah). What would have happened if after Pharaoh's daughter had found Moshe, Miriam had not been there to recommend Yocheved as the abandoned child's hired nursemaid? What would have happened if Yocheved had not reprimanded Miriam, and she would not have taken responsibility for its fulfillment? There were still numerous risks and potential impediments to the timely realization of Moshe's becoming the Redeemer.

Instead, Yocheved reprimanded Miriam who then positioned herself so that she could watch over her brother and the fulfillment of her prophecy. Because of Yocheved's reprimand, Miriam was in the position to offer help to the daughter of Pharaoh and reunite Moshe with his own mother. Because Yocheved was to remain a part of Moshe's early upbringing, she, along with Basyah the daughter of Pharaoh, were able to infuse Moshe with an understanding of his unique circumstances and position. They were able to help him understand the responsibilities of becoming the promised Redeemer.

Many are the thought of man, but G-d's intentions are everlasting. (Psalms 33:10) The enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt and the story of Moshe's birth, upbringing, and eventual selection as the Redeemer, is the story of our survival throughout history. Further study of both the Chumash and the Talmud reveals layer upon layer of G-d's constant protection in concert with the actions of humans. In the end, history is a record of the accomplishment of G-d's loving intentions. This was true in Egypt and it has remained true throughout the millennium. Our responsibility is to study Chumash, Talmud, and history in search of G-d's revealed presence.

Good Shabbos.

---

Copyright © 1998 by Rabbi Aron Tendler and Project Genesis, Inc.

---

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

---