

# MOSHE'S DILEMMA

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

In this week's Parsha, Moshe was faced with a monumental dilemma whose resolution would profoundly affect his personal destiny as well as the destiny of the Jewish nation. Moshe's dilemma was, should he or shouldn't he kill the Egyptian overseer? In the balance was the life of a single man VS the potential redemption of an entire nation.

What did Moshe, his adopted mother Basya, his birth parents Yocheved and Amram, and his siblings Miriam and Aharon, think of his strange and wondrous life story? Moshe was born to the royal family of Amram and Yocheved. He was set afloat in the Nile River. He was found and adopted by the Egyptian Princess - who just happened to be sympathetic to the Jewish condition. He returned to the embrace of his true mother Yocheved and was raised as a prince of Egypt in the house of the evil oppressor Pharaoh. What did they think G-d had in mind? Add to the mix the Medresh that says that Miriam had already prophesized the Redeemer's birth and that her prophecy was realized when Yocheved's home was filled with light upon Moshe's birth. Also keep in mind that a redeemer was expected because Yoseph's last words to his brothers was to expect the eventual redeemer who would take them out of Egypt!

I believe that there was only one logical conclusion to be derived from these not so coincidental events. Moshe was the long awaited redeemer, and G-d's plan was for him to one day ascend to the throne of Egypt and free the Jews from bondage!

The eventual accession by a Jew to the throne of a foreign monarch as a means for redeeming the Jewish people from exile was repeated later in history. In the aftermath of Purim, Esther's son, Darius, granted permission to the exiled Jews of Babylon to return to Israel and rebuild the Bais Hamikdash. The entire story of Esther's marriage to Achashveirosh was divinely orchestrated to provide immediate and long-term benefits for the Jewish nation. As the queen she was able to expose the evil of Haman and save the Jews from imminent destruction. As the queen she gave birth and raised a son who was in the position to effect the fulfillment of prophecy and the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile.

The theme of Moshe's divine placement as heir to the throne of Egypt is echoed in two famous Medrashim. The Medresh explains that Moshe's speech impediment was a result of a childhood accident. Pharaoh, goaded on by his own paranoia, tested the baby Moshe's eventual ambitions by placing before him the coveted crown of Egypt and a glowing brazier of coals. We are told that Moshe first reached for the crown, which would have resulted in his execution, but was redirected

by an angel to touch the glowing coals. He then put his burning fingers to his mouth, which in turn scarred his tongue causing his speech impediment.

The other Medresh reflects on Moshe's behind the scene manipulation of the Egyptian slave economy to provide relief to his oppressed brethren. The Medresh says that Moshe rose through the royal ranks until Pharaoh put him in charge of the entire Jewish slave force. In that capacity he was able to institute changes, such as not working on Shabbos, to the benefit of the Jews. Of course, this was all done without exposing his true identity to either the Jews or the Egyptians.

Given the unique circumstances of Moshe's early upbringing, the incident with the Egyptian overseer takes on profound dimensions and consequences. By having saved the Jewish slave, Moshe "blew his cover". Until that point, Moshe's true identity and mission of redemption had been kept secret by all those involved. Eventually Pharaoh would die, and eventually Moshe would become king and free the Jews. However, by saving the Jew from the Egyptian overseer, Moshe exposed his true identity and mission. It is true that the verse states that "he first looked this way and that way and saw that there was no witness." However, there was at least one other witness to his crime of salvation. The Jewish slave whom he had just saved! Imagine the tale that he must have told that night to his family and friends. "Guess what happened to me today? Not only was I saved from imminent death, but the one who saved me was no less than the Prince himself!"

We know the rest of the story. Moshe was forced to flee Egypt and the Jews remained in captivity an additional 60 years. G-d clearly guides the destinies of individuals and nations so in the end it all worked out. However, there was no way for Moshe to initially know that the consequences of his zealousness would lead to redemption. In fact, it is clear from the incident at the Burning Bush that Moshe believed that he was no longer a prime player in the eventual redemption. His whole argument to G-d revealed that he did not consider himself worthy or appropriate to be the Redeemer. Whatever plans G-d originally had for using Moshe as the Redeemer had been totally compromised by killing the Egyptian. At the time Moshe killed the Egyptian overseer, the question was, should he kill the Egyptian and possibly compromise G-d's well laid plans for Jewish redemption; or, should he spare the Egyptian and sacrifice the Jewish slave in order to maintain the integrity of G-d's plan? What should Moshe do?

Let me reframe the question in more general and philosophical terms. As humans, we are endowed with the divine attribute of free will. We are empowered and expected to make decisions that seem to impact our destinies, the destinies of our families, and possibly the destinies of nations. At the very same time that we engage in our decision making process, G-d has a plan for each of us, as well as the various groupings of people that we associate with, large and small. How are we to reconcile our limited capacity for making decisions with G-d's planned destiny for humanity? What if the decision we make is not in concert with G-d's plan?

The answer is, we are not supposed to attempt that reconciliation. It is not our job to worry about G-

d's plans. Our job is to do what is right, and to avoid doing that which is wrong. Given our limitations in terms of time, space, knowledge, and intellect, we have to trust G-d that He will somehow work out the rest of the details and bring about His intended outcome.

When Moshe was confronted with the dilemma of the Egyptian overseer, he decided to do what he felt was right and necessary for that moment in time. He certainly realized that he was potentially compromising the assumed plan for his one day becoming the king of Egypt. However, there was no guarantee that the plan would ever come to fruition. Who knows how many more years it would have been till Pharaoh died, and when he did die, who could know the political climate of the time and Moshe's chances of becoming the king? So many things could have happened in the intervening time to undermine Moshe's chances of becoming the next Pharaoh! Therefore, Moshe chose to deal with the here and now and trusted G-d to take care of the future.

Moshe attempted to maintain the integrity of the assumed plan by avoiding witnesses; however, he couldn't have possibly known that the very man whom he was saving would then be the one to turn him in!

In the end, G-d's plan worked out exactly as intended. It was not the assumed plan of Moshe succeeding Pharaoh as the next king of Egypt. That plan was what everyone "in the know" thought would be the plan. In truth, there was an added dimension that could only be accomplished if Moshe could have been king but instead lost his chance because he was seen as a traitor to Pharaoh.

Moshe's ultimate goal was to direct the Jewish nation to recognize their absolute dependency upon G-d. However, G-d uses intermediaries to accomplish his ends. The presence of these intermediaries, such as Moshe Rabbeinu, allows us to think that the intermediary is responsible for our redemption rather than G-d Himself. Therefore, G-d created a set of circumstances that would render Moshe uniquely unfit for the job of being the Redeemer.

1. Pharaoh hated him as the traitorous and false heir apparent.
2. The Jews by virtue of his having been removed from their persecution and suffering distrusted him.
3. He had a speech impediment that would interfere with his ability to communicate, lead, or teach.

In the end, Moshe's decision to save the Jew was the right decision to make. As a result, G-d's plan was realized and Moshe became the perfect Redeemer for the job.

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