

## On Destiny and Wise Little Souls



Do we have a destiny that is planned out for us before we're born? Is there a soul, an upper part of us, that has a basic design programmed into it for us to accomplish in our lifetimes? Do we lose that memory early in life so that we have the challenge of trying to remember it during our lives?

It would seem that the supreme importance of free will (our 'prime directive') might seem paradoxical along side the notion that the basic plan is already set. In spite of that, many different traditions seem to be quite clear on the existence of a basic game plan. Yes, we have free will and when the pivotal moments arrive to fulfill that destiny we can change our minds and our direction if we wish. Nevertheless, the original agenda stands. Perhaps that is why there is a mandatory forgetting of this knowledge at birth or shortly thereafter: so that we must challenge our free will to make the choices to re-discover our destiny.

Of course, this notion must also go along with a complementary idea that some higher power is providing opportunities for us to make a choice. As an old saying goes, "coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous."

For some people, even the notion that we are alive and conscious as a soul before we are born is hard to take. Their paradigm does not allow for anything beyond what their five senses can grasp. But paradigms - - models for how we view everything that happens in our lives -- do shift. Often we can't prove what we feel but we somehow suspect it's true.

Let me share legends of three traditions that speak of these things. In spite of how wide apart their sources, each of these legends has common threads. One story that espouses the notion that we have pre-birth knowledge that we forget and must remember is told by Dan Millman. Let me share the quote as he presents it: "Soon after her brother was born, little Sachi began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. They worried that like most four-year-olds, she might feel jealous and want to hit or shake him, so they said no. But she showed no signs of jealousy. She treated the baby with kindness and her pleas to be left alone with him became more urgent. They decided to allow it."

"Elated, she went into the baby's room and shut the door, but it opened a crack -- enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw little Sachi walk quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his and say quietly, 'Baby, tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget.'"

A second, more detailed view of this issue I encountered in a wonderful book called *Of Water and The Spirit* by Malidoma Patrice Some, an African Shaman who was kidnapped by Jesuits at an early age and for fifteen years was 'imprisoned' in a seminary being trained as a priest. At age 20 he escaped and walked 125 miles back to his village where he had difficulty re-acclimating to the traditions of the tribe. He subsequently underwent a vigorous 40-day initiation rite that he should have had at thirteen. Malidoma holds three masters degrees and two doctorates from the Sorbonne and from Brandeis and for three years taught literature at the University of Michigan. (The book tells the whole story.)

One of the practices in the Dagara tribe is that when a woman is pregnant, the elders of the tribe take her to the field and put her into a deep trance. At that time they speak to the child within. It seems to be a form of channeling facilitated by the spiritual power of the elders. The child within reveals to the elders its gender, name, and destiny. In fact, the name given is closely tied to their destiny. Malidoma, for example, means "be friends with the stranger/enemy". After birth the child spends much time with the grandparent, for they are each closer to 'eternity' than the parent, because of their ages.

"Before you were born," says the elder to Malidoma, "your family learned who you were and what your purpose is. You chose to be born within a particular family because that made your purpose here easier to fulfill. While still in your mother's womb, you told the living certain things to remember. But even if they were to tell you these things, would you remember? Would you trust them enough? You would not, because when we come here and take on human form, we change our opinions like the wind. When you do not know who you are, you follow the knowledge of the wind."

A third ancient culture that deals with this issue is the Jewish tradition. According to the Talmud, when a child is in the womb, an angel comes into the womb, lights a candle over the head of the child and teaches it the entire Torah (bible) by heart! According to one variation of the story, the angel also shows the child all of human history from creation

all the way to the future messianic time when the world will live together in peace and brotherhood.

Just before birth, the angel asks the child whether s/he would like to make a commitment to doing some job to hasten the arrival of this utopian age. The child thinks about it and then, just before birth, makes a vow of what s/he would like to do in the lifetime ahead: its destiny.

The angel then 'signs and seals' the agreement by touching the child on the upper lip (leaving the small indentation that we all have on the upper lip) as a sign that the vow was taken. The catch is that at that moment the child forgets everything s/he has learned! The whole Torah and the vow are all forgotten. The child is born crying not because s/he is in pain but because s/he has just forgotten all the wisdom and the destiny plan that was known.

But... not to worry. The child hasn't really forgotten anything. According to some mystics, the angel has simply placed three veils over the child's consciousness: a physical, a psychological and a spiritual veil. Depending on the gender of the child, these veils are lifted at different initiatory moments during life. For example, the removal of the foreskin at the boy's Bris (*Brit Milah*) is the removal of the boy's first veil, the physical, thereby raising his material senses to the spiritual level (or from lower-self to upper-self). The lifting of the veil of the young lady under the marriage canopy is the removal of the third veil, the spiritual. In all three cultures --as well as many others -- it the job of the soul to rediscover its purpose and to fulfill its destiny.

All of these wonderful legends have certain common factors: First, that there is a soul and that it has a certain destiny. Second, there is the belief of the soul's awareness before birth of this potential destiny that it will fulfill in the lifetime ahead. This, of course, is based on the growing person's choice to follow his/her destiny. Third, that some process of forgetting must be undergone to allow for complete exercise of free will. Finally, there is the belief that some higher power will provide the correct scenarios in our lives so we can make the choices to follow and fulfill our destinies.

We should be challenged in three ways by these stories: One, to explore our own paradigms to see if we really believe this whole notion. Secondly, if this is part of our paradigm, to look back at our lives for events ('peek' experiences) that have given us glimpses into our destiny plan. Third, to cultivate a state of mindfulness (using many of

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the skills we have explored together and other techniques as well) to notice these moments of unveiling that happen in our lives as they happen. They may prove to be reminders of something we once knew.

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