

IT'S ALL ABOUT REDEMPTION PART IV

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The Price of Limits - The Destruction of Evil

There was but one, and only barely so.

In all of Sodom and Gomorrah only Lot was deemed worthy of saving. Had they listened, his other children would have also been saved; but in the end, only Lot, his wife, and their two daughters accepted G-d's decree and the inevitability of destruction. They fled from the conflagration of Sodom, but even so Lot's wife did not escape.

Lot and his daughters understood that salvation was the gift of a second chance at goodness and life; however, the gift demanded that evil be left behind. It demanded that they recognize evil for what it is and flee from it without looking back. They had to flee without regret for the evil being destroyed.

Lot's wife could not do so. She had to look back. She could not leave it behind. Therefore, she too was destroyed.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction is the story of human choice and the extremes of free will. It is the story of wasted potential and the inevitability of evil's destruction. Where good (Teshuvah - repentance) will no longer exist there can only be destruction. It is inevitable.

G-d will not sustain evil. G-d gives humankind enough rope with which to hang themselves, but His universe will not sustain evil. Evil will end as definitively as the passage of time, the movements of the cosmos, and the ebb and flow of life. It is built into the inviolate laws of nature.

(Bereishis 8:22) "The days of the earth shall be forever... summer and winter, day and night shall never cease."

(Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch) "...Moreover, these more pronounced and rapid changes in the conditions of life resulted in a shortening of the human life span which, very soon after the Flood, declined to the level at which it has since remained constant...

This curtailment of the human life span was an effective means of making certain that evil will never again gain the upper hand for an indefinite period. Not even the mightiest of despots can wield his scepter for much longer than fifty years. The shorter human life span has served to emphasize the

verity that G-d can build His kingdom even upon the perceptions voiced by young children. "Out of the mouths of children and sucklings You have fashioned invincible might." He has founded His kingdom not upon the cleverness of the old but upon the purity and innocence with which children enter the world...

As long as evil men were able to live on earth for seven and eight centuries, this younger, better, generation never had an opportunity to come into its own. But now, having curtailed the ordinary human life span, G-d can have one generation die off quickly and allow a new, better generation to take its place..."

This theme is clearly evidenced elsewhere in the Torah: a) The Mabul. b) The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah c) Moshe killed the Egyptian overseer because he knew that no good would come from him. d) The Ben Sorer U'Moreh (rebellious son) who is executed because of what he will become. e) The command to destroy Amalek.

Built into the natural and moral laws of the universe is the inevitable destruction of potential that will only produce evil. Whether an individual overseer determined to kill his charge so that his immorality and rebellion not be exposed, or a generation of near immortals that squandered their unimaginable potential of living in Paradise - the destruction was inevitable.

In contrast were Yishmael and Eisav. First Yishmael. An angel appeared to Hagar in this week's Parsha and saved Yishmael from death. Rashi (21:16) relates the Medresh that the angels wanted Yishmael to die. "Why are you giving water to the one (Yishmael) whose children will kill your children with thirst?" Better Yishmael should die now at the age of 17 and never realize the potential for evil that will emanate from him? G-d did not listen to them. Why?

Soon enough we will revisit Eisav's hatred for Yakov. Chazal understood that Eisav and his descendents (the Romans) were responsible for the many centuries of church persecution and anti-Semitism. Why didn't G-d nip it all in the bud? Why allow for such evil to arise. If evil was inevitable so too should have been its destruction!

I would like to suggest that the fact that G-d did not destroy Yishmael and Eisav from the outset is because they did not and do not represent unrepentable evil. With Yishmael Rashi recorded G-d's answer to the angels. "What is Yishmael now? Is he evil or good?" The angels responded, "good." G-d said, "Therefore I judge him as he is, not as he will do." That also means that G-d judged Yishmael as he was and not by who will emanate from him.

Inevitable destruction of evil assumes that repentance will not happen. "We (the Torah) know that this child (the rebellious son) will eventually stand at the crossroads and kill travelers for their money. It is better that the rebellious son die now while yet innocent than be executed in the future as a murderer."

Moshe witnessed the Egyptian overseer beating a Jewish slave who knew that he (the overseer) had

gone against Pharaoh's explicit instructions to not cohabit with the Jewish slave women. Fearing for his own life the Egyptian decided to kill the witness, the woman's husband. Moshe looked into the future (Shemos 2:12, Rashi) and knew that no good would come from him. He deserved to be destroyed.

The prediluvium world lived for 1656 years before G-d sealed the decree of its destruction. In that time they proved their singular determination to serve themselves at the expense of all and everything. "And G-d saw that the wickedness of Man was great upon the earth... I will blot out Man whom I created from the face of the earth..." There was no hope. Humankind had chosen evil over good and death over life. The destruction was inevitable. Not so with Yishmael and Eisav.

(17:5) "Your name shall... be Avraham because I have made you the father of a multitude of nations." Yishmael, Yitzchak / Yakov, and Eisav - the core of the monotheistic world emanates from Avraham and Sarah. All of them (Yishmael and Eisav included) will be part of, "the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."

Blessing is the potential for good. The greatest good is believing in G-d and teaching others to do believe in Him. It is therefore the greatest blessing.

Monotheism dominates our world because of the three great historic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Granted, there are significant differences in their practices and theologies; however, their shared fundamental monotheism has spread the world over through the efforts of Avraham's children. G-d did not snuff out the lives of Yishmael and Eisav because their potential was and remains good. Only unrepentable evil must be destroyed. Regardless of then or now, Yishmael and Eisav have the potential for great good.

The bottom line is that G-d will not sustain the total loss of goodness. So long as goodness is possible G-d provides the chance for its expression. If goodness is no longer possible (Mabul, Mitzri, Amalek, Rebellious Son) destruction is inevitable.

At what price? What was the cost of wiring the universe so that it will not sustain continuous and unrepentable evil? Rav Hirsch explained that by altering the physiology of the world after the Mabul (or during the Mabul) G-d shortened the life span of the human and the ability to perpetuate and perpetrate generations of evil. However, along the way He also shortened the ability to perpetuate and perpetrate generations of goodness. Avraham died when he was 175. Yitzchak died at 180. Yakov died at 147. Even Moshe died at the tender age of 120. The price of curtailing evil was the curtailing of good. Clearly, G-d decided that it was worth limiting the potential for good in exchange for limiting the potential for evil.

Our overriding concern was and remains the destruction of evil. We stand at the threshold of very great happenings. The battle between good and evil is fought on every front. Do not underestimate the strategies of evil. It attempts to reach inside and convince us that good is evil and evil is good. It attempts to confuse us with human failings, inconsistencies and mistakes. It wishes us to believe that

such humanness is evil. Granted, no one is perfect and to be human is to make mistakes; however, do not allow the exposure of our humanness to hide our focus on goodness and the destruction of evil. All evil like Sodom and Gomorrah must end in its time. The Sadams and Arafats of the world deserve to die and do die. The evil they perpetrated will also be destroyed. That part of Yishmael is like Amalek and is unrepentable. That part must be destroyed. How and when it happens will be determined by the will of G-d.

As simple and simplistic as it may sound, I have said before that I am proud that my country and President have chosen to serve Hashem's will. The cost is often greater than first assumed, and as a nation we suffer those losses together. In my mind all other concerns are secondary. G-d and His universe will not sustain evil.

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