

GOD REGRETS FOUR THINGS

By Mois Navon

Introduction

R. Chana bar Acha said: There are four things God **regrets** having created: Exile, the Chaldeans (*Casdim*), the Ishmaelites (*Yishmaelim*), and the Evil Inclination (*Yetzer Ha-ra*). (*Sukka* 52b)

Given that God is by definition omniscient and omnipotent, it borders on the absurd to suggest that God “regrets” anything – as the prophet states, “God is not a man that He should regret!” (*I Shemuel* 15:29).¹ For if He is all knowing, certainly He foresaw the negative outcome of these things; and if He is all-powerful, certainly He has the power to change things to His liking.

The fact that God allowed something to be created and, furthermore, doesn’t change the object of His displeasure, forces us to modify our understanding of “regret” as applied to the divine. As such, I am suggesting, the object of regret under consideration must be of a dual nature – both potentially negative yet indispensably positive. Thus, by saying that God “regrets” something, we are saying that He acknowledges

¹ See Radak (*loc. cit.*).

its latent negative ramifications on the one hand yet is “bound” – as it were – by its imperative necessity on the other.²

With this new understanding let us revisit each of the four cases of God’s “regret” listed in the Gemara.

Exile

Exile is that most undesirable condition, wherein the people of Israel are banished from their land.³ For a nation to be deprived the ability to operate within its own land, to be subject to the sovereignty of a foreign power, severely impairs its ability to effectuate its national mission.⁴ Indeed Rav Z. Y. Kook explains that living in the land of Israel is “the fundamental prerequisite for *Am Yisrael* to be able to function as a nation.”⁵ The *Zohar* (*Vaera* 29b) expresses the idea poetically: “When other nations rule over her [Israel], the voice departs from her and she becomes dumb.”

The Jewish people’s mission, as expressed by the prophet Yishayahu (42:6), is to be: “A light unto the nations.”⁶ This is ultimately accomplished by being an object lesson of national success. It was for this purpose that God gave His Torah – as a guide book to fulfilling the national mission.⁷ And thus it is essential that the Jews apply God’s Torah to every aspect of life. In the words of R. Eliezer Berkovits:

² See *Arukh Le-ner* (*Sukka* 52b). Similarly, the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 27:4) explains that God knew the outcome and allowed it; nevertheless, when the result actually occurred, “He grieved”. The reason God continued with a creation that would in the end “grieve” Him is because He desired the good that man would do (*Bereishit Rabba* 8:4, 8:5).

³ Rashi on *Sukka* 52b – “exile” here refers to that of the Jewish people. The Midrash (*Esther Rabba* 1:3) explains that only the exile of Israel can be referred to as “exile.”

⁴ R. A. Y. Kook, *Orot* (*Orot Ha-techiya*, ch. 64).

⁵ R. Z. Y. Kook (*Torat Eretz Yisrael*, p.114) based on *Sifri* (*Eikev*): “The mitzva of living in the land of Israel is equal to all the *Mitzvot* in the Torah.”

⁶ See especially Radak (*s.v. le-brit am*).

⁷ “Our people is a people only through the Torah” (R. Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, III:132).

Judaism looks upon life as the raw material which has to be shaped in conformity with the spiritual values contained in the Bible.... The teachings of the Torah can therefore reveal their real sense only when there is a concrete reality to which they are applied. Judaism is a great human endeavor to fashion the whole of life, every part and every moment of it, in accordance with standards that have their origin in unchallengeable authority. Its aim is not merely to cultivate the spirit, but infuse prosaic, everyday existence with the spirit.⁸

All of this becomes academic if the people are not in charge of the institutions which shape the character of the society. Again R. Berkovits' words, which were written prior to the founding of the State of Israel in an essay entitled "On the Return to Jewish National Life," are incisive:

The great spiritual tragedy of the exile consists in the breach between Torah and life, for exile means the loss of a Jewish-controlled environment.... It is incorrect to speak, as it is often done among Jews, of the conflict between Judaism and modern life. For as yet there is no modern Jewish life.⁹

This is why it so essential that the people of Israel do everything in their power to maintain the nation in its homeland – *Eretz Yisrael*. And this is why even God Himself "regrets" that the Jews are exiled: for they simply cannot fulfill their mission – which is ultimately His mission.¹⁰

The obvious question, then, is why: Why does God allow something so regrettable to exist?

⁸ R. E. Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism* (Jerusalem 2002), pp. 160-1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁰ *Zohar* (Bo 32b); R. M. Ch. Luzzatto, *The Way of God*, 2:4:9.

From the Depths I Called to You

First Temple

To answer this question, a look into the circumstances which led to exile is essential. Prior to the destruction of both the First and Second Temples and the subsequent exile of the Jews, the people had abandoned, in some fundamental sense, their national mission.¹¹ Referring to the first exile, the prophet Yirmiyahu (9:11) asks rhetorically, “Why does the land perish and is burned up like a wilderness, that none passes through?” To which he answers, “So says the Lord, ‘Because they have forsaken my Torah’” (*Yirmiyahu* 9:12). The Midrash (*Eikha Rabba* Proems 2) emphasizes the point, stating that the exile resulted not even, though one might have expected, for acts as grievous as the three cardinal sins (idolatry, sexual immorality, bloodshed),¹² but rather over rejection of the Torah.¹³ And on God’s lament through Yirmiyahu, “They have forsaken Me and have not kept my Torah” (*Yirmiyahu* 16:11), the Midrash explains, “would that they had forsaken Me but kept my Torah, since by occupying themselves therewith, the light which it contains would have led them back to the right path.”

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 81a) quoting *Yirmiyahu*, explains that the reason for the destruction and subsequent exile was due to the fact that the people did not say the blessing over learning Torah before they engaged in study. The Maharal¹⁴ expresses shock over this reason: “It is rather wondrous that for such a violation such a punishment should be meted out.” However it must be understood that reciting a blessing is making a declaration of intent. The Maharal explains that in the case of Torah-learning, one is declaring that the Torah being learned is from the Creator as an expression of the deep bond with Him. Indeed the Ran (on *Nedarim* 81a), quoting *Megillat Setarim*, explains that by not saying the

¹¹ Sin brought the exile (*Eikha Rabba*, Proems 8, Proems 14).

¹² *Yoma* 9b.

¹³ See also *Zohar* (*Vayechi* 242b) which ascribes exile due to neglect of Torah.

¹⁴ *Tiferet Yisrael*, Introduction, pp. 79-81 (T.A., 1979).

blessing they demonstrated their lack of proper intent, of learning for the sake of the Creator.

Second Temple

As for the second exile, it is well established that the people were Torah scholars during the time of the Second Temple.¹⁵ The Gemara (*Shabbat* 56b) explains that the seeds for the destruction were planted when David accepted the slanderous report of Tziva the servant of Mefiboshet, sole remaining heir to his rival-predecessor King Shaul:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: If David had not accepted a slanderous report, the kingdom of the House of David would not have been divided, and Israel would not have worshipped idols, and we would not have been exiled from our land. (*Shabbat* 56b)

As a consequence of his dividing the estate of Mefiboshet, David was punished in kind by having his kingdom divided between Rechavam and Yeravam.¹⁶ Alternatively, Shemuel – who held that David did not accept the slander – explains that the trigger was Shlomo’s intermarriage. First, Shlomo married Pharaoh’s daughter who introduced idol worship to the kingdom.¹⁷ Following this, Yeravam, as king of the Northern Tribes, installed idols in two key locations in order to prevent Israel from going up to Jerusalem, which was then part of the Judean kingdom of Shlomo’s son Rechavam.¹⁸ The negative repercussions of these events are described metaphorically by the Gemara as giving rise and power to the great enemy¹⁹ of the Jews:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: At the time Shlomo married Pharaoh’s daughter, Gavriel descended and thrust a reed-pole into the sea around which a

¹⁵ *Yoma* 9b.

¹⁶ See Maharsha (*loc. cit.*).

¹⁷ Maharsha (*Sanhedrin* 21b).

¹⁸ Rashi on *Shabbat* 56b (*s.v. velo avdu*).

¹⁹ “*Meyatzer le-Yisrael*” – Rashi on *Shabbat* 56b (*s.v. kerach gadol*).

sandbank formed and upon it was built the great metropolis of Rome. [This is explained in] a *baraita*: On that day when Yeravam placed two golden calves, one in Beit-El and one in Dan, one hut was built [on the sandbank], and this is Italia of Yavan [which became part of the Roman Empire]. (*Shabbat* 56b)

Though indeed Rome came and destroyed the Temple, the Gemara (*Yoma* 9b) explains that it was the “gratuitous hatred” found in that generation that brought about the destruction of the Second Temple and the subsequent exile.²⁰ The precise circumstances are described vividly in the infamous story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza.

R. Yochanan said: What is meant by the verse, “Happy is the man that fears always, but he that hardens his heart shall fall into mischief” (*Mishlei* 28:14). The destruction of Jerusalem came through Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. ... There was a man who had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza. [One day] he held a party and said to his servant: “Go and invite Kamtza.” He went and brought Bar Kamtza [by mistake]. When the host arrived, he found Bar Kamtza seated. He said to him: “You are an enemy of mine - what are you doing here? Get up and leave!” Bar Kamtza said: “Since I have come, leave me be, and I will pay you the cost of what I eat and drink.” The host said: “No!” Bar Kamtza said: “[If you will allow me to stay] I will give you half the cost of the party.” The host said: “No!” He said to the host: “[If you will allow me to remain] I will give you the cost of the entire party.” He said to him: “No!” The host seized Bar Kamtza by the hand, stood him up, and made him leave. Bar Kamtza said [to himself]: “Since the Sages were sitting there, and they did not rebuke him, this indicates they are in agreement. I will [exact revenge and] slander them before the authorities.” Bar Kamtza went and said to the emperor:

²⁰ The Maharsha (*Gittin* 56a, s.v. *shedat*) notes that the Caesar sent a calf to be sacrificed, intimating a connection to the calves that Yeravam installed.

“The Jews are rebelling against your rule.” The emperor replied: “Who says so [i.e., how do you know this to be true]?” He said: “[I can prove my contention and will give you the means to test them.] Send them [an animal as] a sacrificial offering, and you will see if they sacrifice it. [If they reject the offering, this will prove that they are rebelling against your authority.]” [The emperor accepted Bar Kamtza’s proposal and] he went and sent with him [with Bar Kamtza] a three-year-old calf [to be offered as a sacrifice]. Before he arrived [in Jerusalem], he damaged it on the lips. Some say [that the injury was] on the eyelids, in a place that for us [for the Jews] is considered a blemish [and the animal is therefore unsuitable for use as a sacrifice], and for them [for the Romans] it is not considered a blemish [and the animal would remain suitable for offering]. The Rabbis were of the opinion that it should be offered [despite the blemish], so as to maintain harmonious relations with the authorities. R. Zecharya ben Avkulus said to them: “[If we allow the animal to be offered,] people will say that blemished animals may be sacrificed on the altar.” They considered killing Bar Kamtza, so that he would not go and report to the emperor that the sacrifice had not been offered. R. Zecharya ben Avkulus said to them: “Then people will say that one who blemishes a sacrifice is, subject to the death penalty [for they will be unaware of the real reason why he is being killed].” R. Yochanan said: “The meekness of R. Zecharya ben Avkulus [led to] the destruction of our House and burned our Sanctuary and exiled us from our Land.” (*Gittin* 55b-56a)

Though the story is told as paradigmatic²¹ of the gratuitous hatred which was rampant at the time, this is really just another symptom of a much deeper ailment.²² By piecing together the four statements in the

²¹ Maharsha (*Gittin* 56a, *s.v. u-baal*).

²² The fact that Rome, as descendant of Esav, destroyed Jerusalem is indicative of the

Gemara (two in *Shabbat* 56a, one in each *Yoma* 9b and *Gittin* 55b-56a), a complete picture emerges implicating neither “slander” nor “idol worship” nor “gratuitous hatred,” but actually the improper wielding of the powers of state. David incorrectly applied his powers to discomfit and enervate a perceived political threat. Shlomo gave quarter to idol worship in Israel, turning a blind eye to the odious habits of wives which he had married solely to strengthen regional diplomatic alliances.²³ Yarovam employed what was wholly antithetical to Judaism – golden calves, no less – to insure his political hegemony. In the end, the divisiveness²⁴ ingrained over the years by the leaders of the state eventually became woven into the very fabric of society, giving rise to a situation of public humiliation and subsequently, national treason.

Ultimately, the direct cause given for the destruction is nothing other than the inability to wield the powers vested in the leadership. By way of introduction to the Kamtza and Bar Kamtza narrative, R. Yohanan quotes that “one should fear always” – to which Rashi explains that one should be ever concerned to insure that the final outcome of one’s actions does not end up negatively.²⁵ R. Yohanan concludes the Kamtza and Bar Kamtza narrative by implicating “the meekness of R. Zechariya ben Avkulus” for bringing the destruction.²⁶ The upshot of R. Yohanan’s

fact that the Jews had abandoned their divine mission, as this was the condition set by Yitzchak when he blessed Yaakov and Esav. Yitzchak blessed Esav saying, “You will serve your brother [Yaakov], but when your complaints mount up, you will throw his yoke off your neck.” Rashi explains this to mean that “when Israel throws off the yoke of Torah, Esav will be able to throw off her yoke.” *Me-am Lo'ez* (appendix to *Eikha*, p.233) applies this to the destruction of the Second Temple by Rome. “Gratuitous Hatred” is merely a by-product of repudiating the national mission of fulfilling the Torah.

²³ *Da'at Mikra, I Melakhim* (11:1).

²⁴ Rashi (*Shabbat* 32b) points out that “gratuitous hatred” is borne when the object of one’s feelings has not in fact violated any sin for which hatred is required. It is thus reasonable to infer that the hatred espoused was due to political and religious differences.

²⁵ See also R. M. Ch. Luzzatto (*Messilat Yesharim*, p. 269) – the Second Temple was destroyed through saintliness which was not weighed appropriately.

²⁶ Rashi (*Gittin* 56a, s.v. *anavtanuto*) explains that the leadership should have put Bar Kamtza to death in order to avoid the national tragedy. Maharsha (*Gittin* 56a, s.v. *yomru*) indicates that they should have offered the blemished sacrifice for the sake of

words is clear: faced with an acutely difficult decision resulting from the factious nature of the society, the leadership was incapable of perceiving the outcome and appropriately exercising authority.

The Bitter Remedy

Thus, during the final throes of both Temple periods, the Torah – whether in its essence (First Temple) or in its application (Second Temple) – had been abdicated; the Torah – which expresses both the goals and means for the nation to fulfill its divine mission – had been debased. Now, given that the whole reason for national existence was abandoned, God was left with two choices: destroy the people or destroy the Temple and exile the people, in the hope that the trials and tribulations of exile would refocus the nation on its mission. God, in his infinite mercy, chose the latter - as Asaf sings in thanksgiving, “He poured His wrath on wood and stones and not on His children.”²⁷ And as the *Zohar* (*Ha'azinu* 299a) states, “Let Israel be condemned to exile and not to Gehinom.” We may understand that God did this in the hope that by lacking the thing they once had, the Jewish people would come to appreciate it and then repent.²⁸

Indeed this sequence of events – abdication of the covenant, exile from the land, penance in the Diaspora, return to the land – is foretold by Moshe. Referring to the desolation of the land following the exile of the Jewish people he foretells:

peace with the Roman Empire.

²⁷ See *Eikha Rabba* (Vilna) ch.4 s.v. [14] “*kala Hashem*”; *Eikha Rabba* (Buber) ch. 4 (s.v. “*ve-yatzat eish be-tzion*”); *Midrash Tehillim* 72 (s.v. [3] *Mizmor le-Asaf*); *Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim* 247 (s.v. *Mizmor le-Asaf*); *Palgei Mayim* on *Eikha* 2:5. See also Rashi (*Vayikra* 26:41).

²⁸ See also *Eikha* (3:39-42) and *Yechezkel* (20:34-38). R. J. Berman summarizes, “For both Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the exile was to be **rehabilitative** and temporary” (*The Temple*, pp.160-1, emphasis added). Indeed this dynamic fits well with the dictum in the Gemara: “If a person sees that suffering befalls him, let him examine his deeds” (*Berakhot* 5a) – that is to say, with reference to the suffering of exile, God used it to provide the impetus to introspection. Indeed the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 33:6) explains, “‘And among the nations shalt thou have no repose and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot’ – thus if they would have found rest, they would not have returned” – to Hashem (Maharzu, ad loc.).

All the nations shall say, 'For what reason did God do this to this land, and what is the meaning of this great wrath.' And they will say, 'It is because they have forsaken the covenant of the Eternal God of their forefathers which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.' ... And God rooted them out of their land in wrath, and in fierceness, and in great anger... And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you will call them to mind among all the nations, into which the Lord your God has driven you, **and shall return to the Lord your God**, and you shall obey His voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul; that then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will gather you from all the nations, amongst whom the Lord your God has scattered you. (*Devarim* 29:23-30:3)²⁹

And so, though God regrets forcing His people into exile, it is a necessary, lesser evil employed to mitigate a direr outcome, and thereby allow His people to refocus on their national purpose.

Mystical Fixes

Though clearly the primary purpose of the exile was, as stated, to provide the Jews with a perspective from which they would return to their national mission with renewed enthusiasm, there are a number of mystical reasons for keeping the Jews in exile.

Collecting Sparks of Holiness

One reason³⁰ is based on the Kabbalistic notion which maintains that, from a mystical perspective, the world is filled with hidden sparks of

²⁹ See also *Devarim* (4:25-31); *Vayikra* (26:14-19,41-42).

³⁰ *Or Ha-chayim* (*Bereishit* 46:3); *Likutei Amarim Tanya, Iggeret Ha-kodesh*, ch. 26, p.561; *Likutei Amarim Tanya, Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, ch. 11, p.953, esp. nn.

holiness. The way to perfect the world is by unleashing the power of the sparks in every corner of the globe; and this is accomplished by Jews learning Torah and doing *mitzvot* in every place the sparks are hidden.

Collecting Converts

R. Ch. Y. Goldvicht (*Asufat Ma'arachot, Bereishit, "Galut,"* pp. 272-3) expands on the idea of "collecting the sparks," quoting the Gemara (*Pesachim* 87b):

God did not exile Israel amongst the nations other than that they should take on converts.

He explains that at the root of this statement lies the imperative that the Jews are to "collect the sparks" of holiness found amongst the nations. For every nation has spiritual powers of which they themselves may not be realizing; it is then incumbent upon Israel to harness and actualize these forces in order to complete God's work of creation. One of the methods to harness these forces is by converting people from within the nations of the world.

Bringing Blessings to the World

The *Zohar* brings yet another reason for the Jews being placed in exile:

R. Chizkiya said: God placed Israel in exile among the nations in order that [the nations] might be blessed for [the Jews'] sake, for [the Jews] bring blessings from heaven to earth everyday. (*Zohar Vayechi* 244a)

It should be emphasized that these explanations express an "after the fact" – *bedi'avad* – condition and not the desirable way from the outset – *lekhatchila*. The most expedient way to perfect the world is by the Jews fulfilling their role as "light unto the nations" in their land, whereby the other nations emulate the Godly role model and thereby

19, 20.

“release the sparks” scattered around the world. As indeed the *Or Hachayim* (*Bamidbar* 24:17) explains, if only the Jews would return to fulfilling Torah and *Mitzvot*, not even one day would pass in Exile, but they would be immediately redeemed.

The Chaldeans

The Chaldeans (*Casdim*) were the people of the region known as Shinar and, subsequently, Babylonia.³¹ The Maharal³² explains that the source of God’s “regret” here refers to the Chaldeans at the time of Avraham. Their ill repute stems from the ignoble designs of their king Nimrod, of whom it states, “He was a mighty hunter before God” (*Bereishit* 10:9). This description has been interpreted by Rashi to mean: inciting the world to rebel against God; and by Ramban to mean: imposing his sovereignty through military force. R. S. R. Hirsch combines the two interpretations:

Now Nimrod began to suppress his fellow-men “in the Name of God.” He was the first to misuse the Name of God, to cloak his domination under the show of its being pleasing to God, or rather to demand the recognition of his power in the name of God. This went so far later on, that in ancient times kings not only considered themselves there by divine-right and “Nimrods” adorned themselves with the reflection of divine majesty, but they themselves became gods...” (*Bereishit* 10:9)

As such, it is both aspects – rebellion against God and tyrannical bellicosity – that are cause for God’s regret of the Chaldeans. For the two

³¹ Echoing the Gemara (*Chagiga* 13b), Rashi explains that God had the Chaldeans conquer the Babylonians so that the Babylonians would not later scoff at Israel upon being conquered by the contemptible Chaldeans (see also Rashi *Chabakuk* 1:2). Radak and *Metzudat David* on *Yishayahu* (13:19) explain how Babaylonia is under Chaldea rule. Rashi (*Zekharya* 5:11) explains, “two peoples that ruled as one are Babaylonia and Chaldeans.” See also *Yirmiyahu* (32:28); *Kohelet Rabba*. (10:6); *Eikha Rabba* (1:42); Ramban (*Bereishit* 14:1); R. Bachaye (*Bereishit* 14:1). See also *Encyclopedia Judaica*, entry: “Chaldea.”

³² *Gevurot Hashem*, p. 32.

are powerful links in the chain of oppression used to bind the will and work of man – idol worship serving to fetter man’s spirit and tyranny to shackle man’s body.³³

Now, though the Chaldeans represent the acrid melding of these two forces, it is essential to assess each separately in order to understand the absolute significance – negative and positive – of each in its own right.

Hotbed of Idol Worship – Cradle of Prophecy

As mentioned, Rashi (*Bereishit* 10:9) states that Nimrod, “ensnared the minds of people by his words, misleading them to rebel against the Omnipresent.”³⁴ This rebellion became institutionalized in the colossal undertaking of the building of the Tower of Bavel.³⁵ On the building of the tower the Ramban (*Bereishit* 11:2) explains that they sought to undermine the principle of the Unity of God.³⁶ “Rebellion against God,” “undermining His unity” - in the words of the Gemara: Idol Worship.³⁷

Undoubtedly, idol worship is a completely negative channeling of spiritual energy, something God would surely “regret” – indeed it is the first prohibition in the Ten Commandments and is a capital crime carrying the harshest of death penalties.³⁸ Yet what could be positive about so fallacious an ideology?

³³ Y. Hazony, “The Jewish Origins of the Western Disobedience Tradition,” *Azure*, 4, 1998, pp. 21-28.

³⁴ Similarly Rashi (*Bereishit* 10:8).

³⁵ Rashi on *Pesachim* 94b, s.v. *shehimrid*; also Rashi (*Bereishit* 10:8); *Seforno* (*Bereishit* 11:4).

³⁶ Ramban uses the expression “cutting the shoots” which the Maharsha (*Chagiga* 14b) explains to mean a disbelief in the unity of God. See also *Chidushei Geonim* (on *Sanhedrin* 109a in *Ein Yaakov*, pp.220-1).

³⁷ *Sanhedrin* 109a – R. Elazar explains that there were three groups with three different goals, R. Natan states that “all intended idol worship.” The *Torah Temima* (*Bereishit* 11:4, n. 8) explains R. Natan’s point to be that, regardless of the differences in the specifics of the three groups, they all had the intent of idol worship.

³⁸ Mishna *Sanhedrin* 7:1.

For the answer one need look no further then the very city in which Nimrod established his throne: Ur of the Chaldeans. Being that Nimrod was the leader of rebellion against God, Ur of the Chaldeans was a hotbed,³⁹ if you will, of idol worship;⁴⁰ but it was precisely in this environment that Avraham asked, “Is it conceivable that the world is without a guide?” To which God answered, “I am the Guide, the Sovereign of the Universe” (*Midrash Bereishit* 39:1). The power of prophecy which Avraham attained was in part due to the equal and opposing power of idol worship inherent in the place.⁴¹ R. Chaim Eisen in an article entitled, “You Will Be Like God,”⁴² explains that the *yetzer* (desire) for idol worship is the negative manifestation of the power of spiritual creativity which is the root of the power of prophecy.⁴³

While the power of spiritual creativity is indeed most desirable, its negative manifestation is so baleful that it is seen as bringing about the destruction of the First Temple. And so following the destruction of the First Temple, the Rabbi’s prayed that the *yetzer* for idolatry would be removed. The Gemara describes the scene as follows:

They said, “Woe! Woe! It is this [*yetzer* of idolatry] that destroyed the Temple and burnt His Sanctuary and killed all the righteous and exiled Israel from its land, and still it is dancing among us? **Did You [God] not give it to us only to receive reward through it? We do not want it, and we do not want its reward!”** ... They sat in fasting three days and three nights. [The *yetzer* of idolatry] was

³⁹ See *Bereishit Rabba* (38:13) on Nimrod throwing Avraham into the furnace. Also Rashi (*Bereishit* 11:28) that *Ur*=Fire.

⁴⁰ Indeed it called “the land of the diviners” (Ramban, *Bamidbar* 22:5). See also Ramban (*Bereishit* 12:2) who explains that Avraham needed to leave Chaldea due to idol worship; and Radak (*Yirmiyahu* 10:15) that Chaldeans attempted to draw Jews to idol worship.

⁴¹ Maharal, *Gevurot Hashem*, ch. 5; Rambam, *Hilkhos Avodat Kochavim* (1:2); also R. Chaim Eisen, *Jewish Thought*, Vol 2, Num. 1, p.75.

⁴² *Jewish Thought*, Vol. 2, Num. 1.

⁴³ “... It is to the *yetzer ha-ra* – in particular, to the basis for spiritual creativity, ‘*yetzer* of idolatry’ – that we are beholden for this unique prophetic capacity,” Eisen, p.75.

delivered to them. It came out as a lion of fire from the chamber of the Holy of Holies. Said the prophet [Zekharya] to Israel, “It is the *yetzer* of idolatry!” ... As they seized it, a hair was loosed from its mane, and it raised its voice, and its roar went through four hundred parasangs. They said, “What shall we do? Perhaps, God forbid, heavenly mercy is upon it [protecting it]!” Said the prophet [Zekharya] to them, “Cast it into a leaden caldron, and cover its mouth with lead, because lead absorbs sound.” (*Yoma* 69b, emphasis added)

Esoteric though this narrative is, it is essential to understand a number of points. Clearly the Rabbi’s recognized that the *yetzer* of idolatry is a power to be utilized for the good, as they said, “Did You [God] not give it to us other than to receive reward.” Nevertheless, they rejected out of hand its potential benefits due to the devastating consequences of its abuse. When they attempted to destroy it, they realized that God Himself might be protecting it; and thus they resolved to subdue it by “casting it into a leaden caldron.”

The trapping of the *yetzer* of idolatry in “a leaden caldron” did not entirely eliminate its force, but merely muffled its beckoning call from roar to a whisper – “because lead absorbs sound.” This was essential, since its total eradication would have meant the total elimination of spiritual creativity. As it was, the confinement of the *yetzer* of idolatry led to the inevitable diminishment of spiritual creativity and the removal of its ultimate expression – prophecy.⁴⁴

Thus, God “regrets” the negative manifestations wrought by the abuse of the *yetzer* of idol worship; nevertheless, without this power extant man would likewise never look heavenward.

⁴⁴ Eisen, esp. pp. 78-79 and sources in nn. 144-145.

War is the Beginning of Redemption

Referring back to the description of Nimrod as the basis for understanding the Chaldeans, the Ramban explains:

Nimrod began to be a ruler by force over people, and he was the first monarch. Until his era there were no wars and no reigning monarchs; it was he who first prevailed over the people of Bavel until they crowned him. After that he went to Assyria, and he did according to his will and magnified himself, and there he built fortified cities with his power and his might. (*Bereishit* 10:9)⁴⁵

From here it can be seen that a primary negative force of the Chaldeans was their introduction of warfare and tyranny into the world;⁴⁶ the resultant abject misery is clearly a source of regret for both man and God. For through it man has become subject to the rule of “might makes right,” thus turning on its head a world based on morals and ethics - a way of life which could be termed “right makes might.”

The question, once again, is why? Why would God permit such a power to exist?

As before, the answer is to be found in Avraham’s encounters with Nimrod. Just as Avraham stood in firm resolve against Nimrod’s empire of idol worship,⁴⁷ so too did he take up arms against Nimrod’s legions when circumstances demanded. The Torah (*Bereishit* 14) relates how Avraham did not shirk from confronting the most powerful coalition of forces known – led by Nimrod himself⁴⁸ – in order to save his captive nephew.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Similarly Radak (*Bereishit* 10:8).

⁴⁶ Also *Tanchuma* (*Lekh* 7). Indeed the Midrash (*Esther Rabba* 1:17) relates that of the ten portions of “power” apportioned to the world, nine were given to the Chaldeans and one to the rest of the world.

⁴⁷ *Bereishit Rabba* 38:13.

⁴⁸ The Gemara (*Eruvin* 53a) explains that Nimrod was synonymous with Amraphael King of Shinar who warred against Avraham (see also *Bereishit Rabba* [42:1; 42:4]; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* ch. 27; R. Bachaye [*Bereishit* 14:1]). The Midrash (*Vayikra*

Following this war, Malkhitzedek King of Shalem, greets Avraham with the words, “Blessed be Avram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the most high God, who has delivered your enemies into your hand...” (*Bereishit* 14:19-20). From here it can be learned that the positive significance of war, beyond the obvious eradication of evil, is the recognition of God’s sovereignty and power by those who are witness to it.⁵⁰ Indeed it is to this end that war was “created” and will ultimately be used to bring about the final redemption and recognition of God. R. Ch. Y. Goldvicht, in an article entitled, “War, Kingship, and Redemption,”⁵¹ explains this as follows:

War derives from the power of Jewish kingship and redemption. Therefore the King Mashiach will be revealed through battle. That is why bellicosity was introduced into the world and made accessible to all: to facilitate the coronation of God.

This notion is elucidated in the Midrash which states, “When you see nations warring, look for the footsteps of the Messiah” (*Bereishit Rabba* 42:4). “The proof,” continues the Midrash, “is that in the days of Avraham, due to the warring of the nations, redemption came to Avraham.” Thus this first warfare of Nimrod serves as a prototype for all wars till the final Messianic war.⁵² And of what necessity is there for the Messiah to come through battle? The prophet explains:

Rabba 11:7, s.v. *R. Tanchuma*) explicitly holds Amraphael and the Chaldeans responsible for attacking Avraham (see also *Tanchuma, Lekh* 7). And Maharzu (*Bereishit Rabba* 42:4) explains that it was Avraham against Nimrod at the lead of his coalition.

⁴⁹ See Rashi (*Bereishit* 14:9); R. Bachaye (*Bereishit* 14:1).

⁵⁰ Commenting on Melkhitzedek’s praise of God to Avraham, R. S. R. Hirsch (*Bereishit* 14:19, p.262) explains: “By the fact that the Highest God has shown Himself, by giving you this marvelous victory, so near in His Almightyness to men who serve Him, He Himself, His Kingdom becomes blessed, people are awakened and won over to His service.”

⁵¹ *Jewish Thought*, Vol. 3, Num. 2, p.70.

⁵² *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 11) links the two, explaining that Nimrod was the first king of flesh and blood and the Messiah will be the last.

Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, Thus says the Lord God: In that day when my people of Israel dwell in safety, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the far sides of the north, thou, and many peoples with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: and thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, like a cloud to cover the land: it shall be in the latter days, I will bring thee against my land, that the nations may know Me, when I shall be sanctified by thee, O Gog, before their eyes. (*Yechezkel* 38:14-16)

Indeed, even though war – as introduced and perpetuated by the Chaldeans⁵³ – is a most regrettable “creation,” it is an unfortunate but necessary means so that “the nations will know Me.” But furthermore, it is so that Israel itself will know God, as the prophet continues, “So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God ...” (*Yechezkel* 39:22).

Yishmaelim

Yishmael is the progenitor of the Arab nation.⁵⁴ He is introduced in the Torah by an angelic pronouncement to his soon to be mother, “Behold you are pregnant, and you shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Yishmael... And he will be a wild ass of a man, his hand will be against all and the hand of all will be against him” (*Bereishit* 16:12).

Further on, the text provides the first and (almost) sole interaction between Yitzchak – patriarch of the Jewish people, and Yishmael – forebear of the Arab nation:

⁵³ Nebukhanezzar is referred to by the Gemara (*Chagiga* 13b) as “the son of Nimrod,” for he was the spiritual heir to the bellicose legacy of Nimrod and furthermore was the leader of the Chaldeans who conquered Israel (*Tosafot, Chagiga* 13b, s.v. *ben*).

⁵⁴ Rashi on *Sukka* 52b s.v. “*aravim*”. *Zohar* (*Shemot* 17a) equates Yishmael with Arabs.

And the child [Yitzchak] grew and was weaned... And Sara saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born unto Avraham, *metzachaik* (mocking). And she said to Avraham, ‘Banish this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman will not inherit with my son, Yitzchak’ (*Bereishit* 21:8-10)

Based on Sara’s claim that “the son of this bondwoman will not inherit with my son,” Rashi explains the term *metzachaik* (mocking) to refer to a quarrel over the inheritance of the land of Israel.⁵⁵ Paraphrasing the Midrash,⁵⁶ he writes, “Yishmael was quarreling with Yitzchak about the inheritance, saying, ‘I am the first born and will therefore take a double portion.’ They went into the field and he [Yishmael] took his bow and shot arrows at him [Yitzchak]; just as it says in *Mishlei* (26:18-19): As a madman who casts firebrands, arrows and death and says, ‘I am only joking (*mesachaik*)’.”

Such were the beginnings of the relationship between Yishmael and Yitzchak. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 32), however, provides an insight as to where the relationship evolves. In a novel interpretation⁵⁷ of the name Yishmael – which literally means ‘God will [in the future] hear’ – he explains that “God will hear the cries of the people arising from the oppression which the children of Yishmael will bring about in the land [of Israel] in the end of days.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See R. E. Mizrahi (on *loc. cit.*).

⁵⁶ *Bereishit Rabba* (53:11). See also *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 30) which parallels Rashi.

⁵⁷ The text itself explicitly states the explanation of the name, “because God has heard your [Hagar’s] affliction” (*Bereishit* 16:11). Nevertheless, there is room for interpretation, because: (a) this is the explanation the angel gave when the baby was not yet born; Avraham, however, gave the actual name upon his birth; (b) the explanation of the angel is “God heard” – past tense, whereas the actual name is “God will hear” – future tense. See R. David Luria (on *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* [ch. 32]).

⁵⁸ Referring to the time of woes preceding the coming of the Messiah (G. Friedlander, *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* [Sepher-Hermon Press, N.Y., 1981], p.231, n.7). See also R. Ch. Vital (*Tehillim* 124:1).

It is clear that God, whose name is “Peace,”⁵⁹ would regret such a barbaric and belligerent nation. But if so, again the question must be asked, to what end does God maintain such a grievous people in existence?

The answer, explains the *Zohar* (*Vaera* 32a), is “the merit of the *berit mila*”:

Woe, woe, that Yishmael was born into the world and was circumcised! What did the Holy One do [in view of the claim of the angel-prince of Yishmael who asserted that Yishmael deserved reward for his circumcision]? He banished the children of Yishmael from the heavenly communion and gave them instead a portion below in the Holy Land, because of their circumcision. And they are destined to rule over the land for a long time so long as it is empty, just as their circumcision is empty and without completion; and they will prevent the children of Israel from returning to their place, until the merit of their circumcision is exhausted.

From here it is clear that the battle between the children of Yishmael and children of Israel over the Holy Land is linked to the covenant of circumcision, the *berit mila*. This, I propose, is because Yishmael serves an indispensable role in God’s plan. By bearing an “incomplete and empty” circumcision and laying dubious claim to the Abrahamic inheritance, Yishmael exposes Israel’s failure to accept the fundamental terms of the covenant of circumcision upon which rightful claim to the land rests.⁶⁰ For fulfillment of *berit mila* does not refer solely to the physical act of circumcision, but rather to the terms of the

⁵⁹ *Shoftim* 6:24. See *Shabbat* 10b.

⁶⁰ Clearly the *Zohar’s* (*Vaera* 32a) intention of the word “empty” is to the lack of fulfillment of the divine commitments the circumcision symbolizes; for the *Zohar* also uses the term “incomplete” to refer to the physical deficiency in the Islamic circumcision (i.e., they do not remove the thin membrane directly under the foreskin - a procedure in Judaism known as “*periya*”). Furthermore the *Zohar* (*Vaera* 23a) explains that “only those faithful to the covenant can be said to possess the land.”

covenant for which the circumcision is a “sign.”⁶¹ Thus, Yishmael’s antagonism towards Israel bears the subtle yet brutal message: “True, your claim to the land is based on the covenant of circumcision, yet you fulfill it in no greater capacity than I!”⁶²

And so, though God “regrets” the devastation wrought by this wild ass of a people, it is His way of insuring that Israel fulfills the covenant.⁶³ For only then will peace come, as the *Zohar* (*Lekh Lekha* 93b) explains, “when Israel vowed to observe this sign [of the covenant of circumcision] their enemies were overcome and blessing returned to the land.”⁶⁴

Evil Inclination

The evil inclination – the *yetzer ha-ra* – is described as a force having entered into man’s psychological-spiritual makeup upon his eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.⁶⁵ From that time forward, the *yetzer ha-ra* became an integral part of man’s psyche, and it did not take long for man to abuse it to such a degree that the Creator Himself testified, “all the *yetzer* (drive) of the thoughts of [man’s] heart is exclusively evil, continuously” (*Bereishit* 6:5). And following the flood God admits, “the *yetzer* of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (*Bereishit* 8:21). The Gemara (*Chagiga* 16a) states, “‘Evil’ refers solely to the *yetzer ha-ra*.”

⁶¹ Radak (*Bereishit* 17:11) – to be a sign ... that they will be to me a people and I will be a God to them, and they will do my *mitzvot* that I will command them and I will bless them and guard them; and it will be a sign and a reminder... *Seforno* (*Bereishit* 17:11) – “a reminder to go in His ways.” *Shabbat* 33a – *Berit* means nothing other than Torah.

⁶² Indeed the Midrash (*Torah Sheleima*, s.v. *achar ha-devarim ha-eleh*) poses a similar conversation between Yitzchak and Yishmael. In it, Yitzchak concedes that the act of *berit mila* is insufficient to distinguish between the two, but rather affirms his superior merit based on his willingness to fulfill the demands of the covenant unto sacrificing his very life for God (i.e., *Akeidat Yitzchak*).

⁶³ *Zohar* (*Shemot* 18a).

⁶⁴ “If only you listened to my commandments, peace would flow like a river” (*Yishayahu* 48). Similarly *Vayikra* (26:6), *Tehillim* (81), *Zohar* (*Beshalach* 50a).

⁶⁵ R. E. Mizrahi (*Bereishit* 2:25); R. Bachaye (*Bereishit* 3:6, s.v. *vekhi ta’ava*); *Nefesh Ha-Chayim* 1:6 (s.v. *haga veze*); *Bekhor Shor* (*Bereishit* 3:17).

Clearly God, whose very intention for creation was to bestow good,⁶⁶ has reason to “regret” the existence of a force called ‘evil’ – the very antithesis to His purpose. Why, indeed, would He summon such a force into being?

The Midrash asks our question and provides a novel answer:

Perhaps you will say: Why did He create the *yetzer ha-ra*, about which it is written, for the *yetzer* of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (*Bereishit* 8:21)? You say that it is evil; who can make it good? Said the Holy One Blessed Be He: **You make it evil!** Why is it that a child of five or six or seven or eight or nine does not sin, but only from age ten and on – and then he cultivates the *yetzer ha-ra*? Perhaps you will say: No one can safeguard himself [from being corrupted]! Said the Holy One Blessed be He: **You made it evil!** Why is it that, when you were a child, you did not sin and, when you grew up, you sinned? And [furthermore] there are so many things in the world that are more refractory than the *yetzer ha-ra* and more bitter than the lupine, and you diligently seethe it and sweeten it in water seven times until it becomes palatable – and likewise mustard and capers and many [other] things. And if you sweeten for your use [intrinsically] bitter things that I created, how much more so [could you sweeten] the *yetzer ha-ra*, which is delivered into your hands! (*Tanchuma Bereishit* 7, emphasis added)

The point of the Midrash is clear: the *yetzer ha-ra* “is given into your hands” – it is a force to be harnessed and utilized for creativity. The word *yetzer* is linguistically connected to the word ‘*yetzira*’ – creation.⁶⁷ Indeed, if man lacked a *yetzer ha-ra* he would likewise lack the capacity to create. And so the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 9:7) explains, “were it

⁶⁶ See R. M. Ch. Luzzatto, *The Way of God*, 1:2:1.

⁶⁷ See Eisen, nn. 35-36, for an explanation of the difference between *bara* and *yatzar*.

not for the *yetzer ha-ra*, a person would not build a house and would not marry and would not procreate and would not deal in business.”

As a continuation of the story wherein the Rabbis trapped the *yetzer* of idolatry, they decided that they should take advantage of the time of ‘divine favor’ and request to eliminate the *yetzer ha-ra* as well. The event is described as follows:

They said: Since this is a time of divine grace, let us pray for mercy for the *yetzer ha-ra*. They prayed for mercy, and he was handed over to them. He said to them: Realize that if you kill him, the world goes down. They imprisoned him for three days, then looked in the whole land of Israel for a fresh egg and could not find one. (*Yoma* 69b)

Again the point is that the *yetzer ha-ra* is so indispensable for creativity in the world that without it even fundamental creation, like that of an egg, would not take place. In the words of the Midrash, “The world would not endure” (*Midrash Tehillim* 9:1).

The creativity referred to here is not limited to the physical but extends to every realm of human activity – both physical and spiritual. Indeed the *Zohar* teaches, “the *yetzer ha-ra* is as necessary for the world as rain, for were it not for the *yetzer ha-ra*, rejoicing in the discussion of Torah laws would not be” (*Zohar, Midrash Ha-ne’elam*, I, 138a). The Vilna Gaon emphasizes, “All the acts of Creation [including the *yetzer ha-ra*] are good: for the *yetzer ha-ra* also aids the righteous, and the essence of their service [of God] is through it, as is known” (*Be’urei Aggadot on Berakhot* 61b). And on the Mishna (*Berakhot* 9:5) that one must love God “with both the *yetzer ha-tov* and the *yetzer ha-ra*,” R. Israel Lipshutz comments that one should, “use the fire of the *yetzer ha-ra* – such as desire and longing and anger and pride and jealousy – to inflame oneself to perform the commandments and do good deeds” (*Tiferet Yisrael on Berakhot* 9:5).

So what exactly is the *yetzer ha-ra*? It is imagination,⁶⁸ it is enthusiasm,⁶⁹ it is the “will and desire”⁷⁰ that drives man to creativity in every sphere of life. It is a force which can impel man to great good – as the Midrash states, “were it not for the *yetzer ha-ra*, there would be none of that honor [foretold by the prophets] for Israel” (*Tanna de-Vei Eliyahu Rabba* 16); or to great evil – as man’s abysmal history has shown only all too clearly.

And so God “regrets” the existence of the *yetzer ha-ra* for all of the terrible evil that can be wrought through it; nevertheless, without it, man would never aspire to any creativity and the “world would be lost.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that each of the objects of God’s regret are in some way intrinsic to upholding the world as we know it – perhaps that is why they are all referred to as “creations.”⁷¹ Each one of the four provides some fundamental force upon which the world is predicated, similar to the notion that the world is said to have four “forefathers of the world”: Adam, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov⁷² - each of whom contributed to uniquely shaping the world. Indeed, it can be said that the four regrettable “creations” parallel the four forefathers.

- **Adam – Exile.** God created the first man within the ultimate paradise, but man rejected the gift. As a result, God created the principle of exile to give man the opportunity to redeem himself

⁶⁸ *Moreh Nevukhim* 2:12. *Machshevot Charutz*, ch.1, p.3 (quoted in Eisen, p. 74).

⁶⁹ See Eisen, n. 59.

⁷⁰ Ramban (*Bereishit* 2:9).

⁷¹ Thus, even though it has been argued that “exile” is not a “creation” per se (*Yafeh Einayim* on *Sukka* 52b), by its contributing to the existence of the world order, it can be said to be a creation, especially in light of the concept that God “creates” His world anew each day (see *Nefesh Ha-Chayim* 1:2). Also Radak (*Bereishit* 1:1, s.v. *bara*) explains that a “creation” is not necessarily an actual thing, but rather the expressed will of the Creator.

⁷² “*Avot Olam*” (*Bereishit Rabba* 58:4). The four are often grouped together, see: *Sota* 13a, *Shir Ha-shirim Rabba* (1:1), *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Yehoshua* 247:23).

and earn paradise.⁷³ This new effort came to its pinnacle when the Children of Israel entered the land of Israel. Nevertheless, like Adam before them, they too rejected the gift and were subsequently exiled – for just as Adam’s dwelling in the Garden of Eden was predicated on his fulfilling God’s command, so too the Jews’ stay in the land of Israel was dependent on fulfilling the Torah.⁷⁴

- **Avraham – Chaldeans.** The harmonious functioning of God’s creation is predicated upon the recognition that He is the Creator and Master of the Universe. To this end He instilled in creation the yearning for spirituality. The Chaldeans abused this power and instituted rebellion against God, idol worship on a national scale. Avraham took their corrupted spirituality and harnessed it to find the Creator Himself. The Chaldeans introduced warfare into the world, yet it was Avraham who arrested it from them. And it was Avraham’s victorious “redemption” over Nimrod’s Chaldeans coalition that serves as the paradigm for the final battle that will bring the ultimate Messianic redemption of the world.

- **Yitzchak – Yishmael.** To effect the rectification of the world, God chose the nation of Israel to serve as “a light unto the nations” – an object lesson of Divine will as expressed in the terms of the covenant. Towards this end, the nation would need a land to allow it to function as a nation in the fullest sense of the term. Consequently, the deed to the land of Israel is conditioned on fulfillment of the covenant. Yishmael represents, by the perfunctory seal on the skin, the superficial fulfillment of the covenant. His resistance to allow Yitzchak to dwell peacefully in the land of the

⁷³ R. S. R. Hirsch (*Bereishit* 3:22-24), pp. 91-92. See also Ran (*Rosh Hashana* 3a in *Rif*).

⁷⁴ The parallel is further emphasized by the interpretation of the command to Adam to “work and keep” (*le-ovdah u-leshomrah*) the garden which takes it to mean “be occupied (*oved*) in Torah and keep (*shomer*) the commandments” (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 12, 14a). Furthermore, both Israel’s exile as well as Adam’s was in lieu of the requisite (immediate) death penalty. And finally, the *Zohar* (*Ber.* 29a) notes that God’s call, “*ayeka* (where are you),” to Adam following the sin has the same letters as “*Eikha*” (How), which starts the book of *Eikha*, and as such foreshadows the destruction of the Temple.

covenant serves as painful but essential reminder that Yitzchak must fulfill the national destiny for which he was brought into the land.

- **Yaakov – Yetzer ha-ra.** The *Zohar* (*Bereishit* 35b) relates that after Adam sinned, it was none other than Yaakov who came and wrested the power taken by the serpent – the *yetzer ha-ra* incarnate. The *yetzer ha-ra* is that fundamental essence which empowers man not only with a propensity for evil, but with the capacity for great good as well. Yaakov, whose life of trials and tribulations is seen by the *Zohar* (*Vayeishev* 179b) as nothing but a life-long battle with the *yetzer ha-ra*, is the paragon of struggle and victory over the *yetzer ha-ra*. Indeed, the *Zohar* (*Toledot* 144b) explains that Yaakov received the name Israel for struggling and prevailing *with* – not *against* – God. Yaakov prevailed over the *yetzer ha-ra* by putting his trust in God and doing His will,⁷⁵ and thus God aided him in prevailing in his battles.

As such, we have seen that God’s regret is really a reaction to man’s failure to fulfill his role in completing Creation, to man’s abuse of the essential forces He placed in Creation to bring about its happy realization. Of necessity, the will of the Creator will be done, creation will reach its perfection – “today, if you will hear my voice.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The *Zohar* (*Toledot* 144b) explains, “Should a man be minded to purify himself and to observe diligently the precepts of the Torah, the good prompter (*yetzer ha-tov*) who is associated with him will overpower the evil prompter (*yetzer ha-ra*), who will then make peace with him and become his servant... then God makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” This idea is similarly expressed in the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b), “Torah is the *tavlin* – the spice – for the *yetzer ha-ra*” – the *yetzer ha-ra* can be mastered for good only through the curing effect of the Torah.

⁷⁶ Eliyahu quotes *Tehillim* 95:7 to explain that the Messiah’s imminence awaits only man’s fulfillment of the divine will (*Sanhedrin* 98a).