

How to Destroy the World

Rabbi Joshua said: An evil eye, the evil inclination and hatred of his fellow creatures put a man out of the world. (m.Avot 2:16)

In our last mishnah we began learning the primary teachings of Rabbi Yochanan's star pupils, starting with Rabbi Eliezer. This time we will learn from Rabbi Joshua. Just as we did with Rabbi Eliezer's teachings, we will examine Rabbi Joshua's teachings and see how they compare to Yeshua's. Rabbi Joshua says that three things put a man out of the world: an evil eye, the evil inclination, and hatred of one's fellowman. Things that "put a man out of the world" are essentially things that destroy a person and the world along with him. Our every action works toward either the repair or the destruction of the world. Let's work to understand each of these forces of destruction listed by Rabbi Joshua.

The Evil Eye

What is the "evil eye," and how do we avoid it? The evil eye is simply an attitude of the heart that is completely focused on one's self. It is always focused on how someone else has it better. A good eye is focused on the welfare of others. A good eye is generous. An evil eye believes that generosity is foolish and should be avoided at all costs. This is what Yeshua says about the evil eye:

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy [or "good"], your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad [or "evil"], your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Matthew 6:22–23)

Yeshua decries the one who has an evil eye, saying that this attitude will eventually work its way into every part of one's being to reap corruption and destruction. We must avoid having an evil eye, and the solution is to continually work toward blessing others rather than being self-focused.

The Evil Influence

In Judaism we teach that humans have two competing desires that wage war within him. They are the *yetzer hatov* (the good inclination) and the *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination). These basic components are within the nature of every person. Christian theology tends to balk at such a concept. However, if we really think about it, this should be self-evident. First, we know that we have an evil inclination. We've all experience this from our childhood on. Paul calls it "the flesh." James, the brother of the Master, attests to it also:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (James 1:13–14)

James recognizes the fact that when we are tempted, that temptation comes from within. It is something within us that is drawn to what is forbidden. Almost always, however, that

temptation comes in the disguise of something that is both pleasing and seemingly beneficial. The *yetzer hara* is crafty in that it lulls us into letting our guard down, working to gain our confidence before leading us on to a destructive path.

The *yetzer hatov*, however, is more elusive within the Scriptures. Many, who uphold a Reform theological position, claim it does not exist. However, if we look at how Hashem admonished Cain to resist his *yetzer hara*, we can see a glimpse of the *yetzer hatov*:

If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it. (Genesis 4:7)

Hashem told Cain that he had the ability to conquer both temptation and sin. Hashem had put within him this ability. As human beings created in the very image of God, we have an inborn desire to please our Creator. It is the godly soul He has put within us. Paul alludes to this when he contrasts “the flesh” with “the spirit.” Many times that is hidden beneath the dominance of the *yetzer hara*, but it is there nonetheless. The difference in disciples of Yeshua is that through the empowering of his Spirit he gives us the ability to suppress the *yetzer hara* and make it subservient to the *yetzer hatov*. In Romans 8, Paul essentially says that the person who follows the *yetzer hara* cannot please God, but only the person who is led by the *yetzer hatov*, the spirit of God He placed within them, empowered through the Ruach Hakodesh. We must live lives empowered by God’s Spirit to make our flesh submit to His will, conquering the *yetzer hara* daily.

Hatred of Others

The last thing that works towards the destruction of both man and his world is the hatred of others. The first murder was precipitated by hatred. The destruction of the Holy Temple was said to have been brought about by baseless hatred of one’s fellowman. Hatred towards millions of people simply because of their ethnicity brought about the Holocaust. Hatred works to undermine the preeminence of the command to love one’s neighbor. Therefore, hatred is a bitter root that works its way into any crevice to destroy everything in its path. Yeshua warns us against this by telling us to be proactive against its seduction. He instructs us:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:44–45)

How do we conquer the destructive forces of a world bent on hate? With the power of love. It is only through this persistent love that we will truly become the children of our Heavenly Father and bring hope to a world bent on self-destruction. An evil eye, [submitting to] the evil inclination, and hatred of our fellowman do indeed destroy all that the Father loves. Let’s work diligently to combat these through generosity, self-control, and love.