



הטוב האבוד The Lost Good

■ Let Hashem Rejoice in His Creations

The creation of the world was accompanied by true joy: the happiness of the Creator at the world He had formed. In Chapter 104 of Psalms (and see Medrash Tanchuma, Sh'mini 2), we find an expression of the pure and lofty happiness that reigned at that time:

יְהִי כְבוֹד ה' לְעוֹלָם יִשְׂמַח ה' בְּמַעֲשָׂיו.

*May the glory of the Lord endure forever,
let the Lord rejoice in his creatures.* (Tehillim 104,31)

On every day of Creation, the Torah notes, *“Hashem saw that it was good.”* The sixth day, just before the completion of Creation, was the climax: *“Hashem saw everything that He had done, and behold, it was very good”* (B'reshit 1,31). The creation of the universe was the very “essence of good” - and the creation of man was the “top of the top” of the revelation of the Divine goodness.

But then, incomprehensibly, something happened. After only ten generations, the atmosphere changed totally and unrecognizably, as the Torah bears witness: *“Hashem saw that man’s evil was great, and that his heart’s thoughts were only evil ... He regretted having made man on the earth; it grieved Him at His heart.”* (B'reshit 6,5-6)

The joy turned into sorrow; the *“very good”* became *“only evil all day long.”* And we ask: How can this be? How was it possible that from this absolute goodness, such badness should sprout forth? The answer to this very profound question is supplied by King Solomon in Kohelet.

■ The Giver and the Recipient

כִּי יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמַל בְּחָכְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן
וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל בּוֹ יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ, גַּם זֶה הַבֵּל וְרָעָה רַבָּה.

*There is a man who labors with wisdom, knowledge and skill,
yet he must leave a portion for a man who did not work for it;
this too is vanity and great evil.* (Eccl. 2, 21)

King Solomon thus defines for us the root of all evil – egotism and egocentricity – and its source: One who receives everything on a silver platter without having to work for it and without sharing, develops the sense that he is the center of all and that everything is for his benefit.

This definition helps us also understand the opposite of evil: goodness. Its source is kindness and giving to others; sensitivity and consideration; the desire to help the weak and needy; and the will to contribute to future generations.

But, amazingly enough, we will be disappointed to realize that it is actually the generous and caring father who is devoted to his son and works hard to fill all his needs, who creates via this very goodness the roots of evil in his son. This is because he thus accustoms the boy to receive everything without working for it, and to think only about himself.

We asked above, how is it possible that out of such goodness could sprout evil? Chazal, our Sages of blessed memory, took a close look at the above-quoted verse in Kohelet, and found the answer right there. Though on the straightforward *pshat* level, the verse refers to the seeming unfairness of a man having to work for others, the Medrash (Kohelet Rabbah 2,21) guides us to concentrate on how G-d created the world with wondrous wisdom and then granted it to man who did nothing to deserve it. In B'reshit, we saw the end result of receiving something – unlimited goodness – for nothing: *“Man’s evil was great.”*

This gives rise, most naturally, to the following questions: Can anything be done to protect ourselves against this phenomenon? Is it inevitable and inescapable that doing good for others who might not deserve it, should result in bad? Should we refrain from doing good in order to avoid this?

■ Planting for My Children

The answer is found in the following story, brought in the Medrash (Vayikra Rabba 25, 5; Tanchuma Kedoshim 8):

The Roman Emperor Adrianus (Adrian) passed through with his armies on his way to war. On the way, he saw an old man planting fig trees. Adrianus asked him, "How old are you?" The man said, "I am one hundred years old."

Adrianus said, "An old man such as you should toil and plant trees?! Do you really think you'll ever eat from them?"

The old man answered, "Your Excellency, I plant. If I have merit, I'll eat from the fruits of what I plant, but if not, then just as my fathers toiled for me, so I toil for my children."

Three years later, Adrianus returned from the wars. He found the same old man, in the same place – collecting figs in a basket from the trees he had planted. The man gave a plateful of the nicest figs to Adrianus, and said, "Your Excellency, I am the same old man you saw last time standing and planting. G-d has privileged me to eat from the trees I planted, and these fruits in the basket are also from those trees."

Adrianus immediately told his servants, "Take the basket of fruit and fill it for him with coins of gold."

The old man's so-critical message can be summed up in a few words: "My ancestors worked for me, so too, I will work for my children." When we do good, we must add guidance and instruction. We must request and insist that our recipients act as we do and perform good deeds for others. We thus redeem our goodness from its negative consequences, and it will beget more goodness of the same type.

A father who is concerned for his son and wishes to shower blessing and gifts upon him, will also make sure to educate him to do the same for his own offspring, and so on and so forth, throughout all the generations.

Noach and his family, alone among all humanity, received their lives as a gift from G-d. In exchange, he was asked to grant life to all other creatures in the world. This was Noach's central mission, and he spent the next full year, day and night, fulfilling it in the Ark upon the waters. By giving to others, he rectified the root of evil of the generations before him that had brought the flood upon the world. Just as you are given something, so must you give to others.

■ "He Has Found Good"

A famous verse in Mishlei, the Book of Proverbs by King Solomon, reads as follows:

מְצָא אִשָּׁה מְצָא טוֹב וַיִּפֶּק רְצוֹן מֵהָ.

*Who has found a wife has found goodness,
and has obtained G-d's favor.* (18,22)

Why is marriage akin to finding goodness? In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon elaborates somewhat: *“Two are better than one”* (Kohelet 4,9) – it is better to be with a wife than without. But is that the entire depth of the matter?

Let us return to the story of Adam and Eve. After Adam's creation, G-d said:

לֹא טוֹב הֵיئֶתֶר הָאָדָם לְבָדוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ עֶזְרָא כְּנֶגְדּוֹ.

*It is not good for man to be alone;
I will make him a helpmate.* (B'reshit 2,18)

Let us take note that the very “aloneness” of man is that which causes the *not good* situation. This means that “finding woman,” which Kohelet says brings good, means *finding the lost good*. How does this work?

When a man is alone, he is unable to bestow good upon others. Thus, according to what we learned above, when he is alone and lacks the opportunity to be good to others, the good done for him is also *not good*. Only when a man finds the woman who will be his partner in life, is he finally able to give good to someone else - and thus turn the good that was done to him into absolute good. If his wife then acts the same way towards him, their lives will become “good” - as is written, *“Two are better - more good - than one.”*

To be concise: Marriage is not a means by which to obtain goodness, but rather a way of giving mutual goodness.

Let us return once more to the story of Creation. The first thing Hashem did was to plant: *“G-d planted a garden in Eden, in the east”* (B'reshit 2,8). This is the reason why one of the first things that Bnei Yisrael were supposed to do when they entered the Land was to plant, as is written: *“When you come to the Land, and plant all manner of food trees...”* (Vayikra 19, 23)

The Children of Israel are a reflection of the Divine Will, and they must aspire with all their might to be like Hashem. In this vein, the Medrash explains the above verse to mean that G-d told Israel: “Even though you will find Eretz Yisrael to be full of plenty when you arrive, do not sit idly, but rather make sure you plant trees. And just as you come in and find trees planted by people before you, so too you should plant for your children.” (Medrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim 8)

■ Why Do You Sit Alone?

Another example of this concept is found regarding Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah uses the phrase לא טוב, *It is not good*, only twice: once when referring to a man without a wife, as we have seen, and once when Yitro was speaking to his son-in-law Moshe. Yitro saw Moshe sitting and judging the people all day long, and he said: “*That which you are doing is not good*” (Sh'mot 18,17). Here too, this “not good” comes in the context of aloneness:

מדוע אתה יושב לבדך וכל העם נצב עליך מן בקר עד ערב?

Why do you sit alone, with the entire nation waiting for you from morning to night? (verse 14)

Moshe was giving his all to Bnei Yisrael, helping them solve their disputes every hour of the day – but he was doing it all by himself. Yitro advised Moshe not to work alone, but to grant some of his judicial authorities to other judges. This act would be a blessing not only for the relief it provides Moshe, but for future generations as well, in that teaching additional judges to take responsibility forms the foundation of a well-structured, long-lasting judicial framework.

■ Let There be a Firmament

On the second day of Creation, the famous phrase “*It was good*” is not written. But on the third day, it appears twice:

ויקרא אֱלֹהִים לַיַבֶּשֶׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים,
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.

*G-d called the shore “land,” and to the gathering of waters
He called “seas” – and G-d saw that it was good.*

וַתוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׁא, עֵשֶׂב מְזִרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ עֵשֶׂה פְרִי...
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב.

*And the earth gave forth vegetation, seed-yielding herbs... and trees
producing fruit... and G-d saw that it was good.* (B'reshit 1,10-12)

The explanation is this: On the second day, the upper waters were separated by the firmament. The waters stood there alone and isolated, with no ability to influence or shower its plenty upon anything. There was still no earth, and there was nothing on which to rain down to bring forth fruits. There was nothing to give to – and this was the reason the phrase “*it was good*” is missing from the story of the second day.

But on the third day, when the earth was exposed and became land, the upper waters began raining down its blessing on the earth. Only then did the creations of the second day become “*good.*” And then, on the next day, when the earth perpetuated the kindness of the rains and began sprouting forth fruit, grass and flowers, the third day, too, deserved its own “*for it was good.*”

Just as the rain benefited the earth, the earth benefited man. This is another example of the phrase coined by the old man planting the tree: “As my fathers toiled for me, so I toil for my children.”

■ Ignorance Can be Beneficial

Our Sages, in their deep, perceptive understanding of the human make-up, noted that it is specifically our inability to predict the future that contributes to the constructive building of the world. The Medrash Tanchuma (Vayikra, Kedoshim 8) explains:

If not for the fact that Hashem has hidden our date of death, people would not build houses or plant trees. They would say, “Tomorrow I die, so why should I work hard for others to benefit?” Hashem therefore concealed the date of death, so that people would build and plant: He who is deserving, will benefit from his own work, but the work of he who has insufficient merits will benefit someone else.

What this Medrash essentially means is that much of what a man does for himself will really, in the end, be for the next generation. And this is exactly the great secret plan of the Divine Providence by which the world constantly develops and grows.

This leads us to the following point, which we express very cautiously, but strongly steeped in faith and truth: Whoever shares with others the goodness and kindness with which Hashem has blessed him, is actually doing a great kindness to none other than Hashem. For it is because of these actions that G-d’s goodness becomes productive and complete, and can therefore bring no bad in its wake.

For as we said, if a person does not do kindness to others, but is engaged only in receiving goodness from Hashem and worrying about himself – as did the early generations of Creation – this creates a situation of evil. It is G-d’s will that we walk in His ways, and try to be like Him, and do kindness to others, thus completing and revealing the perfect goodness. As

we say in the introduction to the Grace After Meals, ובטובו חיינו, *through His goodness, we live.*

Is it within our grasp and comprehension to truly understand the concept of doing kindness to Hashem? Is there really anything that we can give to Him Who is master over everything?

Apparently, yes. In the merit of the concept of Free Will – instituted for us at G-d's desire – it is our choice to act selfishly and immorally, or to perform kindness with that which G-d has graced us. If we choose the latter, Hashem can be proud of us and rejoice in His world, just as He did when He created it. In the merit of our good deeds, the goodness of Creation will remain eternal – and certainly not a goodness that produces its own opposite.

As the Prophet Yeshayahu states:

וַיֹּאמֶר לִי עַבְדִּי אַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּךְ אֶתְפָּאֵר.

*He said to me, "You are My servant, Israel,
in whom I will take pride."* (Yeshayahu 49,3)

