

The lost good of creation

Genesis 1:4

God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:

NOTE: The word *good/tov/טוב* appears seven times in the first chapter of the Torah, which is the first telling of the story of creation.

What does it mean in context? How does it function to structure the flow of the story?

Two days of creation do not have any mention of *good/tov/טוב* – the second day and Shabbat.

Rashi explains why the second day lacks a reference to *good/tov/טוב*, and offers some understanding of the essential definition of the word:

Rashi Genesis 1:7

... Why is it not stated in reference to the work of the second day “that it was good”? Because the work associated with water was not completed until the third day — He only began it on the second — and anything that is not completed is not in a state of perfection and at its best (and so cannot be termed “good”). Therefore on the third day when He completed the work associated with water and another work was commenced and finished, the words *טוב כי* are repeated, once in reference to the completion of the work of the second day, and again in reference to the completion of the work of that day (Genesis Rabbah 4:10).

מעל לרקיע. על הרקיע לא נאמר אלא מעל לרקיע, לפי שהן תלוין באויר. ומפני מה לא נאמר כי טוב ביום שני? לפי שלא היה נגמר מלאכת המים עד יום שלישי, והרי התחיל בה בשני, ודבר שלא נגמר אינו במלואו וטובו; ובשלישי שנגמר מלאכת המים והתחיל וגמר מלאכה אחרת, כפל בו כי טוב שתי פעמים, אחת לגמר מלאכת השני ואחת לגמר מלאכת היום:

What explanation can you offer for why Shabbat lacks a reference to *good/tov/טוב*?

What unique qualities are attributed to Shabbat and how might they relate to *good/tov/טוב*?

Moshe Tuviya

Babylonian Talmud Menachot 53b

Let the good one come and receive the good from the Good for the good ones. He explained: 'Let the good one come;' this good is Moses, as it is written about him: "And when she saw him that he was a goodly child" (Exodus 2:2). 'And receive the good;' this good is the Torah, as it is written about the Torah: "For I give you a good doctrine; do not forsake my Torah" (Proverbs 4:2). 'From the Good;' this is referring to the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is written: "The Lord is good to all" (Psalms 145:9). 'For the good ones;' these good ones are the Jews, as it is written with regard to them: "Do good, Lord, to the good ones" (Psalms 125:4).

יבא טוב ויקבל טוב מטוב לטובים יבא טוב זה משה דכתיב (שמות ב, ב) ותרא אותו כי טוב הוא ויקבל טוב זו תורה דכתיב (משלי ד, ב) כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם מטוב זה הקב"ה דכתיב (תהלים קמה, ט) טוב ה' לכל לטובים אלו ישראל דכתיב (תהלים קכה, ד) הטיבה ה' לטובים

What does it mean to say that good/*tov*/טוב is the central theme for the Jewish story?

How do each of the source texts sighted expand our understand of what good/*tov*/טוב means and how it is expressed in the world?

Exodus 2:2

The woman conceived and bore a son, and [when] she saw him that he was good, she hid him for three months.

וַתַּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי-טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים:

What is the meaning of good in context of this verse?

What meaning is added/enhanced to the usage by the textual parallel to the first telling of the story of creation (i.e. and God saw that it was good...)?

Babylonian Talmud Sotah 12a

"And the woman conceived, and bore a son; and when she saw him that he was a goodly [*tov*] child, she hid him three months" (Exodus 2:2). It is taught that Rabbi Meir says: "Tov" is his real name. Rabbi Yehuda says: His name was Toviya. Rabbi Nehemya says: They said he was good because they saw that he was fit for prophecy. Others say: because he was born when he was already circumcised. And the Rabbis say: At the time when Moses was born, the entire house was filled with light, as it is written here: "And when she saw him that he was a goodly [*tov*] child," and it is written there: "And God saw the light, that it was good [*tov*]" (Genesis 1:4).

"וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי טוֹב הוּא." תַּנְיָא, רַבִּי מֵאִיר אָמַר: "טוֹב" שְׁמוֹ. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אָמַר: "טוֹבִיָּה" שְׁמוֹ. רַבִּי נְחֵמְיָא אָמַר: הֵגוֹן לְנִבְיָאוֹת. אֲחֵרִים אָמְרִים: נֹלַד כְּשֶׁהוּא מְהוּל. וְחֲכָמִים אָמְרִים: בְּשַׁעַת שְׁנוּלֵד מֹשֶׁה, נִחְמָהּ אָמַר: הֵגוֹן לְנִבְיָאוֹת.

Source Sheet: The Gate of Tov (Good)

נְתַמְלֵא הַבֵּית כּוּלּוֹ אֹר. כְּתִיב הֶכָּא: "וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאֹר כִּי טוֹב". וְכִתִּיב הֵתָם: "וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאֹר כִּי טוֹב".

Babylonian Talmud Berachot 5b

R' Hiyya bar Abba, fell ill. R' Yoḥanan entered to visit him, and said to him: Is your suffering dear to you? R' Hiyya said to him: Neither this suffering nor its reward. R' Yoḥanan said to him: Give me your hand. R' Hiyya gave him his hand, and R' Yoḥanan stood him up (restored him to health.) R' Yoḥanan fell ill. R' Ḥanina entered to visit him, and said to him: Is your suffering dear to you? R' Yoḥanan replied: Neither this suffering nor its reward. R' Hanina said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand, and R' Ḥanina stood him up. Why? Let Rabbi Yoḥanan stand himself up! They say: A prisoner cannot free himself from prison...

רַבִּי חֵיִיא בַר אַבָּא חָלַשׁ. עַל לְגַבִּיָּה רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר לֵיהּ: חֲבִיבִין עֲלֶיךָ יִסּוּרֵין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: לֹא הֵן וְלֹא שְׂכָרָן. אָמַר לֵיהּ: הֲבַלִּי יְדָךְ. יְהֵב לֵיהּ יְדֵיהּ, וְאוֹקְמִיהּ. רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן חָלַשׁ. עַל לְגַבִּיָּה רַבִּי חֲנִינָא. אָמַר לֵיהּ: חֲבִיבִין עֲלֶיךָ יִסּוּרֵין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: לֹא הֵן וְלֹא שְׂכָרָן. אָמַר לֵיהּ: הֲבַלִּי יְדָךְ. יְהֵב לֵיהּ יְדֵיהּ, וְאוֹקְמִיהּ. אָמַר, לוֹקִים רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן לְנַפְשִׁיהּ? אָמְרִי: אֵין חֲבוּשׁ מִתִּיר עֲצָמוּ מִבֵּית הָאִסּוּרִים.

- Why would a prisoner not be able to free themselves?
- What constraints (physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual) limit you?
- What is the challenge in moving beyond them yourself? Who or what might help you be free of them?

The Good from the Good One

Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 105a

R' Yoḥanan said the “anokhi” that begins the 10 commandments is an abbreviation for: I myself wrote and gave [ana nafshi ketivat yehavit] (or: I wrote down My very Soul and gave it to you.)

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן דִּידֵיהּ אָמַר: "אֲנֹכִי", נוֹטְרִיקוֹן: אֲנָא נַפְשִׁי כְּתִבִּית יְהֵבִית.

- What is the difference between giving everything one has and giving oneself?
- What type of relationship emerges from each?

Numbers 12:8

With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of ה'. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!"

פֶּה אֶל-פֶּה אֲדַבֵּר-בּוֹ וּמִרְאָהוּ וְלֹא בְּחִידֹת וּתְמַנֵּת יְהוָה יִבִּיט וּמִדּוּעַ לֹא יִרְאֶתֶם לְדַבֵּר בְּעַבְדִּי בְּמִשָּׁה:

This is a description of Moshe’s unique status. What does it mean to “behold the likeness of God?”

Source Sheet: The Gate of Tov (Good)

How would you reconcile this description with the prohibition in the Second Commandment:

Exodus 20:3

You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth.

לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּמִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּיַּם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ:

How does the following episode challenge/enhance your understanding of what it might mean that Moshe 'beheld God's likeness?

Exodus 33:13-23

Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find favour in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said to him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up from here. For in what shall it be known here that I and thy people have found favour in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be differentiated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the Lord said to Moshe, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found favour in my sight, and I know thee by name. And he said, I pray thee, show me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face; for no man shall see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away my hand and thou shalt see my back: but my face shall not be seen.

וְעַתָּה אִם-נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הוֹדַעֲנִי נָא אֶת-דַּרְכְּךָ וְאֲדַעַךְ לְמַעַן אֲמַצֶּא-חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כִּי עִמָּךְ הִגֹּי הַזֶּה: וַיֹּאמֶר פָּנֶי יֵלְכוּ וְהִנַּחְתִּי לָךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אִם-אֵין פְּנִיךָ הַלְכִים אֶל-תַּעֲלֶנּוּ מִזֶּה: וּבַמָּה א יוֹדַע אִפּוֹא כִּי-מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲנִי וְעִמָּךְ הֲלוֹא בְלִכְתֶּךָ עִמָּנוּ וְנִפְלִינוּ אֲנִי וְעִמָּךְ מִכָּל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: {פ}וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּי-מָצָאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינֵי וְאֲדַעַךְ בְּשֵׁם: וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרָאִנִּי נָא אֶת-כְּבוֹדְךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כָּל-טוֹבִי עַל-פְּנֶיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְחִנַּתִּי אֶת-אֲשֶׁר אַחֲן וְרַחֲמֹתַי אֶת-אֲשֶׁר אַרְחֵם: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לְרַאֲתַּ אֶת-פָּנָי כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֶנִּי הָאָדָם וְחִי: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל-הַצּוּר: וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כַּבֵּדִי וְשַׁמְתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר וְשַׁכַּתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד-עֲבָרִי: וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת-כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת-אַחֲרֵי וּפְנֵי לֹא יִרְאוּ:

For the Good Ones

Rav Y. A. HaKohen Kook, Orot, The Lights of Yisrael 1:4

The very desire to be good to all, without any boundary or restraint whatsoever (be it in the number of ways or the quality of the good), is the inner seed of the essential character of the soul of *Kneset Yisrael*. This is her inheritance and her portion from her fathers. To the extent of its greatness, breadth and depth, this feeling of good must be crowned with great wisdom and mighty strength in order to know how to actualize it in all its aspects. This is the secret of the desire for redemption within the nation, which gives her strength to live and persist in a fashion that strikes wonder in the hearts of all who consider. In the depths of her desire, *Kneset Yisrael* is not separate from Divinity at all, she clothes herself in the Divinity revealed in the world as a whole and her desire is the Divine desire of "the Lord is good to all, and His mercies are on all His works." (Psalms 145:9) This good is the secret of the redemption, inevitable in coming. Good of necessity will overcome all, and the deep innate desire for goodness, the longing for it within the essential inside of the nation's soul that finds expression in its inner prayer, joins her to redemption. "...and I did what is good in Your eyes..." (Isaiah 38:3) This is one who joins redemption to prayer.' (Berachot 10b)

עצמות החפץ של היות טוב לכל, בלא שום הגבלה בעולם כלל, בין בכמות הניטבים ובין באיכותו של הטוב, זהו הגרעין הפנימי של מהות נשמתה של כנסת ישראל. זאת היא ירושתה ונחלת אבותיה. הרגש הטוב הזה, לפי גדלו, היקפו ועמקו, כן צריך שיהיה מעוטר בחכמה גדולה ובגבורה כבירה, למען דעת איך להוציאו אל הפעל בכל גווניו. וזהו סוד השתוקקות הגאולה שבאומה, הנותן לה כח לחיות ולהתקיים באופן המפליא את לב כל חושב. כנסת ישראל בעומק חפצה איננה מחולקת מהאלהות כלל, היא מלבשת את האלהות המתגלה שבעולם הכללי, וחפצה בהיותה את החפץ האלהי של טוב ד' לכל, ורחמיו על כל מעשיו. זה הטוב הוא הסוד של הגאולה, המוכרחת לבא, הטוב מוכרח לנצח את הכל, והחפץ העמוק והמוטבע של הטוב, והשיקוק הפנימי לו בעצם תוכיות נשמת האומה, המתבלט בתפילת האומה הפנימית, מסמיך לה את הגאולה. "והטוב בעיניך עשיתי, זה שסמך גאולה לתפילה" (ברכות י').

What does it mean that Israel in its ideal material and spiritual sense are an embodiment of the Divine desire for goodness in creation?

How is the desire to do good "the secret of redemption"?

What does it mean to be one of the good guys?

Isaiah 43:10-12

"You are My witnesses," says the Lord, "and My servant whom I chose," in order that you know and believe Me, and understand that I am He; before Me no god was formed and after Me none shall be. I,

Source Sheet: The Gate of Tov (Good)

I am the Lord, and besides Me there is no Savior. I told and I saved, and I made heard and there was no stranger among you, and you are My witnesses," says the Lord, "and I am God."

אתם עדי נאם-יהוה ועבדי אשר בחרתי למען תדעו ותאמינו לי ותבינו כי אני הוא לפני לא-נוצר אל ואחרי לא יהיה: אנכי אנכי יהוה ואין מבלעדי מושיע: אנכי הגדתי והושעתי והשמעתי ואין בכם זר ואתם עדי נאם-יהוה ואני-אל:

Hakarat Hatov – Recognizing the good

Exodus 30:7

On it Aaron shall burn aromatic incense: he shall burn it every morning when he tends the lamps,

והקטיר עליו אהרן קטרת סמים בבקר בבקר בהיטיבו את-הנרת יקטירנה:

Babylonian Talmud Keritut 6b

Mar said: While [the craftsman] ground [the incense] he would say, ‘Hodeik heiteiv, heiteiv hodeik,’ because the sound is good for the spices...

אמר מר כשהוא שוחק אומר היטב הדק הדק היטב...

What does the process of readying oil lamps to light and preparing incense to burn have in common?

How do you ready yourself for action? How do you ready yourself to do what is good?

Deuteronomy 6:18

Do what is right and good in the sight of יהוה, that it may go well with you and that you may be able to possess the good land that your God יהוה promised on oath to your fathers,

ועשית הישר והטוב בעיני יהוה למען ייטב לך ובאת וירשת את-הארץ הטובה אשר-נשבע יהוה לאבתך:

Ramban on Deut. 6:18

The plain meaning of the verse says, “Keep the commandments of G-d, His testimonies, and His statutes, and, in observing them, intend to do what is right and good in His sight only.” And [the expression in the verse before us] that it may be well with thee is a promise, stating that, when you will do that which is good in His eyes, it will be well with you, for G-d does good unto the good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. Our Rabbis have a beautiful Midrash on this verse. They have said: “[That which is right and good] refers to a compromise and going beyond the requirement of the

Source Sheet: The Gate of Tov (Good)

letter of the law.” The intent of this is as follows: At first he [Moses] stated that you are to keep His statutes and His testimonies which He commanded you, and now he is stating that even where He has not commanded you, give thought, as well, to do what is good and right in His eyes, for He loves the good and the right. Now this is a great principle, for it is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man’s conduct with his neighbors and friends, and all his various transactions, and the ordinances of all societies and countries. But since He mentioned many of them — he reverted to state in a general way that, in all matters, one should do what is good and right, including even compromise and, going beyond the requirements of the law. Other examples are the Rabbis’ ordinances concerning the prerogative of a neighbor, and even what they said [concerning the desirability] that one’s youthful reputation be unblemished, and that one’s conversation with people be pleasant. Thus [a person must seek to refine his behavior] in every form of activity, until he is worthy of being called “good and upright.”

ועשית הישר והטוב בעיני ה' על דרך הפשט יאמר תשמרו מצות השם ועדותיו וחקותיו ותכוין בעשייתן לעשות הטוב והישר בעיניו בלבד ו למען ייטב לך הבטחה יאמר כי בעשותך הטוב בעיניו ייטב לך כי השם מטיב לטובים ולישרים בלבותם ולרבותינו בזה מדרש יפה אמרו זו פשרה ולפנים משורת הדין והכוונה בזה כי מתחלה אמר שתשמור חקותיו ועדותיו אשר צוך ועתה יאמר גם באשר לא צוך תן דעתך לעשות הטוב והישר בעיניו כי הוא אוהב הטוב והישר וזה ענין גדול לפי שאי אפשר להזכיר בתורה כל הנהגות האדם עם שכניו ורעיו וכל משאו ומתנו ותקוני הישוב והמדינות כלם אבל אחרי שהזכיר מהם הרבה כגון לא תלך רכיל (ויקרא יט טז) לא תקום ולא תטור (שם פסוק יח) ולא תעמוד על דם רעך (שם פסוק טז) לא תקלל חרש (שם פסוק יד) מפני שיבה תקום (שם פסוק לב) וכיוצא בהן חזר לומר בדרך כלל שיעשה הטוב והישר בכל דבר עד שיכנס בזה הפשרה ולפנים משורת הדין וכגון מה שהזכירו בדינא דבר מצרא (ב"מ קח) ואפילו מה שאמרו (יומא פו) פרקו נאה ודבורו בנחת עם הבריות עד שיקרא בכל ענין תם וישר:

What does it mean to intend to do what is good and right when one fulfills the commandments? What does the intention possibly add to the action? What is the action without the intention?

If there is a level of goodness which is ‘beyond the requirements of the law,’ how are we to know what it is? How is it to be expressed in action?

Deuteronomy 3:25

Pray let me cross over and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon.

אֶעְבְּרָה־נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן הַהַר הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבָּנוֹ:

Theodor (Binyamin Zeev) Herzl

“I once called Zionism an infinite ideal, and I truly believe that even after attaining our country, the Land of Israel, it will not cease to be an ideal. Because Zionism, as I see it, entails not only the aspiration for that piece of land lawfully promised to our unfortunate people, but also the aspiration for moral and spiritual perfection.”

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What is your greatest vision of good in your own life? In your community? In the world?