

## And Elokim saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good. (1:31)

We have read the above *pasuk* countless times; it is reiterated a number of times in the *parsha* about *Brias ha'Olam*, Creation. Yet, do we ever stop and ask ourselves: If the world is so good, why does Shlomo *Hamelech* begin his *Sefer Koheles* with the famous phrase – *Haveil havalim ha'kol hevel*, “Futility of futilities – all is futile!”? If all is futile, then it really cannot be *tov meod*, very good. How are to understand this? The **Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita**, explains that it all depends on one's religious experience. If he carries out the will of the Almighty, if his life is filled with *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim*, good deeds, then it is *tov meod*, very good. If, however, his life is characterized by abandon, with no relationship with Hashem, then it is all futility of futilities. His life is a waste.

This explanation is accompanied by a meaningful analogy. The king of the land had a son who was outstanding in his ability to absorb everything to which he set his mind. Among the many disciplines which he had mastered proficiently was medicine. He was a brilliant diagnostician and was able to prepare the exact remedy that would cure just about any disease. One day, the prince took a stroll on the king's vast grounds. He wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of the palace, soak up some fresh air and relax amid the quiet of the surrounding forest. Carried away with his “freedom,” he lost track of the palace boundaries and wandered off onto the property of the duke, who was no friend of the king. As a result, he was taken captive by the duke.

Overnight, the prince went from royalty to servitude. His new job was working in the stone quarry, breaking up large stones. Such work takes its toll on even the hardiest workers. The prince was far from hardy. In no time, he would become a broken person. One day, the duke became gravely ill. Since the man was quite wealthy and money means nothing to a dead man, he sent out messengers to all areas of the country in search of a doctor who might save him. Money was no object. Various physicians were brought in – all, to no avail. The duke was rapidly wasting away. Soon, he would be nothing more than a memory.

At this point, the prince came before the superintendent of the prison and asked for an audience with the duke. “I can save him,” he said. Both the jailor and the duke could not believe the prince's insolence. How could a lowly slave succeed where everyone else had failed? The prince reiterated his earlier request: “Allow me to leave, and I will heal the duke.” The prince was released from the dungeon, and, after diagnosing the duke's ailment, prepared a powerful potion which cured the duke in a matter of days.

“Why did you not inform me that you were proficient in medicine?” the duke asked the prince. “You never asked me,” replied the prince. “Instead of inquiring about my abilities, you immediately incarcerated me in the dungeon and put me to work chopping stones. I figured if you are a fool, it was your loss. In any event, sooner or later, my father and his armies would have located me and liberated me from this dungeon.”

The lesson is very simple. The Jewish People are Hashem's children. Our goal and purpose in life is to study and master the Torah – which is the remedy for every ill known to mankind. If, however, *Klal Yisrael* deviate from their mission in life, and, instead of delving into Torah, revert to other disciplines which only succeed in distracting and turning them away from their source of life, they will fall captive to the futilities of life. Sadly, some Jews only discover their holy mission in life after they have fallen captive to the secular culture surrounding them. When the gentiles discover the beauty and value of Torah, when they see the way of life experienced by the observant Jew, they change. They are cured from their illnesses. Life is futile when it has no direction. It is meaningless when one has no purpose. When a Jew lives a life of purpose, with goals and objectives that spiritually elevate him, then it is *tov meod*, very good.

We might suggest another interpretation for the Torah's emphasis on the underlying meaning behind *tov meod*. I think the Torah was intimating the perspective we should adopt upon viewing a person who manifests good and bad, behavior that is, at times, praiseworthy and, during other instances, iniquitous. I recently came across a thesis delineating the *ahavas Yisrael*, love for each Jew, as manifest by each of three great *chassidic* leaders: *Horav Zushia, zl, m'Anapole*; *Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m'Berditchev*, the *Baal Shem Tov, zl*.

*Rav Zushia* embodied *Shlomo Hamelech's* maxim, *Al kol peshaim techaseh ahavah* , “Love conceals all iniquities” (*Mishlei* 10:12). He did not notice the iniquities that the average man saw. People saw sin; he saw nothing. People perceived iniquity; he saw nothing of the sort. When others saw evil; he saw nothing. He was a person who was simply incapable of noticing anything negative about his fellow Jew. Whenever he did hear about someone's egregious behavior, he would find some way not to allow it to jaundice his perception of the person. He literally saw no evil.

The *Berditchever* was the Jewish People's consummate advocate. He always found some way to justify a person's behavior – regardless of its nefarious nature. He always provided some excuse. Unlike *Rav Zushia*, the *Berditchever* was well-aware of a Jew's failings and shortcomings, but he always found a way to justify his actions, to extend a positive spin to the man's misdeeds.

*Rav Zushia* saw no iniquity; the *Berditchever* more or less white-washed it. The *Baal Shem Tov's* love, however, superseded even that of his two disciples. To him, *ahavas Yisrael*, loving every Jew, extended beyond a refusal to see his evil, or endeavoring to cleanse his iniquity. The *Baal Shem Tov's* love for each and every Jew was unequivocal, incontinent; it was consummate love in its totality. This means that he was aware of the person's evil, his transgressions, his mean streak, but it did not matter – he loved him all the same – sin and all! The *Baal Shem Tov* loved the wicked sinner with the same degree of boundless love that he harbored for the greatest *tzaddik*. Why? They were all Hashem's children. A father loves all of his children the same – regardless of who they are and what they have done.

I think this is what the Torah is teaching us with the words *tov meod*. Hashem saw the world and its creations, mankind. They were all His. He knew that some would be imperfect, but they were still

His! He taught us that everything is good. We should not make the distinction between bad and good when it comes to loving a fellow Jew.