

## **G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good. (1:31)**

It was not just “good” – it was very good. Each of Hashem’s creations was good in its own right. When combined together as part of the greater creation, the totality was even better, explains the *Meshech Chochmah*. *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, views this alternatively. Can we say that all of Hashem’s creations were good? Are suffering, pain, grief, temptation and death considered to be good? Surely, we could do without any of these. *Rav Hirsch* explains that, indeed, isolated and viewed in a free-standing context, these challenges to life do not come across as being good. As part of the larger picture to which we as mortals are not privy, however, everything fits in perfectly – even to the point that it is very good. Perhaps, this is what is meant by, *Es kol asher asah*, “All that He had made.” Hashem’s view is that of *kol* – all. His perspective is sweeping and, therefore, able to perceive everything in an inclusive context, with all events intertwined into one collective image.

A well-known *Midrash* concerns the concept of *tov me’od*, very good. *V’hinei tov me’od – zeh Gehinnom*. “This is *Gehinnom*, Purgatory.” How can *Gehinnom* be considered *tov me’od*? The *Toldos Yaakov Yosef, zl, m’Polanaah (Tzafnas Paaneach* end of *Beshalach*) writes: “I heard that there is no *Gehinnom*; rather, the *rasha*, wicked person, is brought to *Gan Eden*, and that becomes *Gehinnom*. He hears people *davening* with joy, and they are dancing and learning with *hasmadah*, diligence. Since this way of life is a complete anomaly to him, it is painful to watch.” When he observes those whom he has scoffed and belittled in the past experience joy; when he sees the exhilaration of those living the life that he once denigrated, for him, it is pure *Gehinnom*.

This is what is meant by *Gehinnom* being *tov me’od*. *Gehinnom* does not exist, explains the *Toldos Yaakov Yosef*. There is only *Gan Eden*, but, when a *rasha* is placed into *Gan Eden*, it is, for him, *Gehinnom*.

One does not have to wait for his “one hundred and twenty” to experience this feeling of envy, regret, and resignation. I had a friend growing up who, at an early age, dropped out of *yeshivah* and slowly moved left, then overboard. We would meet every once in a while, and the conversation usually drifts to the choices we made in our lives. He has never intimated even the slightest sense of envy. After all, he was doing well financially. While I was in *Kollel*, he had the perfect American family down to the dog; he had the large house, fancy car, trips and vacations, parties and friends of all faiths and creeds that were engaging, while I was blessed with a growing family, growing bills, small apartment, no vacations, and the only friends that I had were like me. I was happy and showed it. He could not understand what there was about my life that could inspire any form of joy. Years passed, he married again – and again; his children grew up and had very little to do with him. He even lost his dog as part of one of his divorce settlements. He still had a large house – but no one lived in it but him.

My friend visited recently on *Pesach*, and he saw my family. His reaction was bitter weeping. He

saw my *Gan Eden*, and he finally realized that he had spent an entire life preparing his *Gehinnom*. I believe *Horav Zusia, zl, m'Annipole* once commented, "We arise in the morning and make our daily preparations: search for our socks, look for our shirt, our shoes, our pants, etc., but we forget the most important point; to find ourselves." We spend our lives caring about the non-essentials and inconsequential and ignore the most important, the one who for whom we are making the choices: ourselves. If we would be honest and ask ourselves what it is that we really want, and respond from the heart – not from peer pressure, we could not be compelled to look back with envy and regret. At that point it is too late, because we no longer know who we are.