

Ve'eschanan

Homes Filled with Pig

And it will be when Hashem, your God, brings you to the Land that He promised your forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, to give to you great and good cities that you did not build. And homes filled with all good things that you did not fill...

Dvarim 6:10, 11

The Ten Commandments are recorded twice in the Torah.¹⁰¹ The first time that they are recorded, in Shemos, is with the text of the first tablets, according to the Gemara.¹⁰² The second time that they are recorded, in Dvarim, is with the text of the second tablets. The first tablets, says the Talmud,¹⁰³ did not contain the word “*tov*” (good), because they were going to be broken. The second tablets do, however, contain the word *tov*.¹⁰⁴ The *gematria* of the word *tov* is seventeen. There are seventeen more letters in the second tablets than there were in the first ones.¹⁰⁵ The difference between them is *tov*.

The first tablets were a piece of Hashem’s throne.¹⁰⁶ The second tablets were made of stone.¹⁰⁷ On the surface, there could be no way to compare the first tablets with the second ones. R. Avraham Ibn Ezra¹⁰⁸ quotes the words of the Gaon, who wrote that “the second tablets were more glorious than the first,” and questions them. He asserts that these words have no merit at all, for, in fact, the first tablets were entirely holy and miraculous, and the second tablets were simple, and merely replacements. What could possibly be the meaning of considering these tablets the more glorious ones?

The Jewish people were told that upon entering the Land, they would be given homes filled with all kinds of *tov*, good things.¹⁰⁹ (The words *tov* and *toiv* are essentially the same word, but the pronunciation is different for grammatical reasons.) The Talmud¹¹⁰ tells us that this

101 Shemos 20; Dvarim 5.

102 See Bava Kamma 54b. See also Midrash Lekach Tov. But this is not the last word, for there are indications otherwise elsewhere. See Rashi to Sanhedrin 56b, s.v. *kaasher* as well as *Aruch Laner* and *Margoliyos Hayam*, ad loc. See also *Hamikra Vihamesora* of R. Reuven Margoliyos, where he devotes a chapter to this issue. See also *Raza Dishabbesi* to Bava Kamma 54b, and *Zera Shimson* to Ve'eschanan.

103 Bava Kamma 54b

104 Dvarim 5:16

105 *Baal Haturim* to Dvarim 5:16, and Rokeach, ad loc.

106 Tanchuma, Ekev 9. See also R. Bechaya to Shemos 31:18, that “*luchos*” in *atbash* is “*keisei*”! See also Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:12, that the *luchos* were made from the sun (*galgal bachamah*), and see *Tzofnas Paneach* to Bereishis 24:1, regarding the significance of the Torah’s being from the sun.

107 Shemos 34:1

108 Commentary to Shemos 34:1

109 Dvarim 6:11

110 Chullin 17a. See also R. Bechaya to Dvarim 6:11. See *Meshech Chochmah*, ad loc., that despite the fact

promise included “even dried strips of pig,” and along with this, the permission to eat them! For the seven years that it took the Jewish people to conquer the Land of Israel, they were granted the permission by Hashem to eat anything that they wanted, kosher or not. Not only is this the case, but the Jewish soldier who is at war may eat non-kosher food anytime that he grows hungry, even if his life is not in danger.¹¹¹ How peculiar!

The Jewish people did not want to enter the Land of Israel when they were offered the chance. They weighed the opportunities that lay before them: They had the option of staying in the desert, where their clothing would grow with them, their food would fall from the sky and their every need would be cared for. They could sit in the comfortable clouds of glory and study Torah from some of the most incredible of men who ever lived. Or, they had another choice: Entering a land where they would have to fight wars and make their own living. They would have to tend vineyards and herd sheep. There would be less time for Torah study and prayer. Life would be more challenging. This land was occupied by giants, and those physical giants were a threat to them; but the greater threat to them was the spiritual challenge, and this is why the spies suggested, “It would be better for us to return to Egypt!”¹¹² The words used are *tov lanu shuv mitzrayma*. The tune that we use for Torah reading is marked by *taamim*, or cantillation signs, and in this *passuk*, there is a peculiar cantillation sign beneath the word *tov*, the word for “good.” The *mercha kefula* is one of the less common signs to find under a word. Meshech Chochmah¹¹³ tells us, in another context, that whenever we encounter a *mercha kefula*, it is an indication that there is something double about the word, as though it were written twice. So, the Torah reads, “double *tov* for us to return to Egypt.” Caleb and Yehoshua valiantly fought for the Jewish people’s vote. They wanted the Jews to enter the Land of Israel, and face its challenges head-on, and responded to the derisive talk of the other spies by exclaiming, “The Land is extremely, extremely good.”¹¹⁴ – *Tova baaretz meod meod*. Let us discover what is

that this food is permissible, it would nevertheless cause *timtum halev*. He cites *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 138:14 that one should violate the Shabbos rather than feed the ill person a piece of non-kosher meat, because that meat would cause him *timtum halev*. The same explanation of the ruling of *Shulchan Aruch* is advanced by Netziv in *Harchav Davar*. See, however, Taz, ad loc., for an alternative interpretation; that every *kezayis* eaten constitutes its own prohibition. See also *Pnei Menachem* (end of Parshas Shmini), where he attempts to prove from *Nimukei Yosef* to Makkos that *timtum halev* is the result of the *issur*. There is room to wonder if the *timtum halev* due to the consumption of certain foods became a reality only once those foods were forbidden at Sinai, and remain damaging even if eaten with permission, or if the *timtum halev* is entirely related to the *issur*, and only occurs when one eats that food in *issur*. See also Chida’s *Pesach Einaim* to Avodah Zarah 26a for a detailed discussion of the sources for the idea of *timtum halev*.

111 Rambam, *Hilchos Melachim*, 8:1. See R. Bechaya, *ibid.*, for a discussion of the opinions of Rambam and Ramban as to when these rules apply, and whether the food may be eaten even when there is other food available. See also Griz to Dvarim 6:10 regarding what lies behind this dispute. Also see *Reyach Dudaim* (by R. Z. E. of Dinow, to Meseches Megillah) 13a, s.v. *vishmuel amar*, where he suggests that this is why Esther was ordained to be with Achashverosh, and Mordechai took over Haman’s house, because there was good to bring forth from the forbidden, just like the dried pig! He also quoted the Arizal, who explains that we drink on Purim in order to blur the difference between Haman and Mordechai, and find the little spark of good that existed in Haman, bringing that to holiness, as did Esther and Mordechai, respectively.

112 Bamidbar 14:3

113 Bereishis 27:25 quoting the *Zohar*

114 Bamidbar 14:7

behind this exchange.

“And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was extremely good.”¹¹⁵ This is how Hashem concludes the sixth day of Creation. The only praise that we had seen for the world before the sixth day was that it was *tov*, good. But on the sixth day, when man was created, the world was suddenly “extremely good.” Why the change?

The Midrash¹¹⁶ teaches us, “Good – this is man’s positive urges. Extremely Good – this refers to his negative urges.” The ability to be good without a challenge is really not all that good. In fact, the only way to make “good” into “extremely good” is through challenge. The fellow who does what is right so that he can win a great prize has not done something as good as the man who has done the same act despite many obstacles, or a loss of money. True and lasting good is the good that is done when a person makes his choice amidst things pulling him in the other direction. When there is darkness, and light emerges, this is good in its extreme manifestation. The word *tov* is man’s good inclination, and it is like most of the world. All of this is nice, but relatively meaningless without the *meod*, the “extreme-ness” that challenge brings into the equation. The only way that we can really and truly be good, and make that a good that will last is through fighting, through challenge to uphold that good, both within and outside of ourselves.

The Jewish people were focusing on preserving the *tov* within themselves. They wanted a world of *tov*, where they would not be challenged, or threatened as much. They did not appreciate what Caleb and Yehoshua were trying to impress upon them. “You claim, ‘*tov, tov*,’ but we tell you ‘*meod, meod*.’” All that good is not really very good without the challenge – *meod*; however, the *meod* is only a qualifying word for the *tov*. It is what allows the good to continue. And if the good does not have a *meod*, if the good will not last, it was not really good. The first tablets did not contain the word *tov*, for they were going to break; they were not going to last.

We recite the Alenu prayer before we leave the synagogue. After Shacharis, Mincha and Maariv, we say Alenu. After Kiddush Levana or a bris, we say Alenu. On Shabbos, when we are not leaving the shul until after Mussaf, we do not say Alenu after Shacharis, but rather, we wait until after Mussaf. R. Yoel Sirkes, the Bach,¹¹⁷ explains that the reason Alenu is recited at the end of our prayers to give us a message on our way out of shul. As we leave the shul to go out into the world, we remind ourselves “that they bow to nothing and worship powers that offer no salvation, but we bend and bow, and thank the King, Who is King of Kings, God.” We remind ourselves that despite the confusion that reigns in the world – a confusion that has the power to distract us from what life is about – just as it distracts so many, we have the truth. We remind ourselves to live by the principles that we glean from our time in shul, when we are out in the world. R. Yechezkel Weinfeld explains that this is why our tradition says that

115 Bereishis 1:31

116 Bereishis Rabbah 9:7

117 To *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 133

Yehoshua wrote the Alenu prayer.¹¹⁸ It was Yehoshua who brought the Jewish people into the Land of Israel from the desert. He took them from a life of “shul” and study to a life of challenge. It was he who led them from their secluded place of holiness out into the world. Thus, it was he who gave them the message that future generations would recite whenever they would have to go out into the world. It was a message of pride, with a touch of ethnocentrism. It was the Alenu.

But that is not all that there is to the story. When the Jewish people were capturing the Land of Israel, they went to war with Yehoshua at the helm. Yehoshua warned them not to take from the spoils of war, and they all listened. With one exception. Achan took from the spoils. When Hashem made this clear to Yehoshua, Achan was sentenced to death. But just before he was killed, after he repented for his sin, he wrote a supplement to the Alenu that we still recite today.¹¹⁹ It begins with the words, *Al ken nikaveh*, the first letters of which are his initials! Why on earth was Achan the man who had to write this part of Alenu? When we look at the words that he wrote, we find a vision of the entire world living together in harmony, removing evil from the world, and proclaiming God as King over the entire world, with every man, woman and child recognizing the truth and living in harmony, with common purpose. It is the goal that we share, despite the seeming ethnocentricity. There is a place for every human in the divine scheme of things, and that is our ultimate goal. Achan’s message was, “we can take from the outside world,” and although he was mistaken in its application at that point in history,¹²⁰ there was truth in his ideas. And so, we still say it every day. When we go out into the world to conquer, we have the ability to make things kosher that were not so. When the soldier is at war, he eats whatever he would like. He is extending the borders of the Land of Israel, and is finding good in the outside world. The ethnocentricity that we impress upon ourselves is vital, for there is a great danger that we will otherwise lose ourselves in the jungle that is our frightening world. But with the right attitude, we can make certain things from the outside world kosher.

The *tov* that exists in the world is the *tov* that we bring out as *tov meod*. Good is only really good when it comes from challenge, for then, it has been earned and then, it can last.

The second tablets were stones. They were not as magnificent as the first tablets, said the great Ibn Ezra. But, the words of the Gaon are nonetheless true, explains R. Naftali Zvi Judah

118 *Machazik Bracha* (Chida) to *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 132:2, quoting a responsa of R. Hai Gaon

119 Rokeach, *Siddur Yaavetz* to Alenu; *Regel Yesharah* (by R. Zvi Elimelech of Dinow), *maareches ayin* 83; *Kaf Hachaim* to *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 132:15. Regarding the *vav* that some have at the beginning of the phrase “*al ken nikaveh*,” thus making it “*vi’al ken nikaveh*,” see *Siddur Aliyos Eliyahu* of R. Aaron Lopiansky, notes to Alenu.

120 According to *Shayarei Korbán* to Talmud Yerushalmi 27a, s.v. *vilo od*, Yehoshua was mistaken in imitating Moshe, who prohibited taking from the spoils in his wars, because in the time of Yehoshua, Hashem had promised them “houses filled with good things”! See *Maharsha* to Sanhedrin 44a, and *Maharatz Chajes* quoting a letter received from the Chasam Sofer, ad loc. See also *Shaalos Uteshuvos Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim* 208.

Berlin, the Netziv.¹²¹ The second tablets were from a time of darkness. The Jews would never have forgotten the Torah if they had not sinned by making a Golden Calf, and lost the first tablets. The second tablets represented a Torah given out of darkness. They were quiet, and simple. The second tablets left room for the Torah to be forgotten in exile. The great effort that we put into Torah study is precisely a result of this, he explains. The ability to be original, and to toil to develop our own approaches to Torah is a product of our struggle in darkness. If we did not have the darkness, the Torah would have never made it. The word *tov* could not appear on the first tablets, for they could never have survived. Only tablets that would be given in the darkness without all the miracles of the first set could really be *tov*, and really last. And on the deepest of levels, the Gaon was correct, says the Netziv. Though the tablets were simple pieces of stone, they were far more glorious than the first set, for they were a product of struggle, of error and correction, and they introduced to us a world of Torah study, struggle and forgetfulness that was the context in which we could toil and exert and become great in ways that we never could have had we never been faced with the challenge in the first place.