



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Bereshit: Is Humanity "Good"?

After each and every act of creation, God looks at the new creation and proclaims: טוב ויהי טוב – “It was good” (1:4,10,13,18,21,25). God makes this pronouncement six times; the seventh time is a sort of finale or summation: “And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good” (1:31)

But here is a fascinating observation. This statement is articulated regarding the light, seas, land and vegetation, luminaries, birds and fish, animals, BUT NOT ABOUT HUMANS!

Why not? Is mankind not “good”?

The Meshekh Chochma suggests the following:

It does not state that “God saw that it was good” about man as with all other creations, and man is merely included in the generic summative statement. This feature hints at human free-choice. Whereas all creatures follow a natural predetermined behavior, humanity has no natural predetermination; rather human action is a product of choices, and man’s freedom means that he may fluctuate. Hence God cannot “see” man’s innate goodness.

And now, see the closing lines of the parsha where society has become corrupt. There (6:5-7) humanity is depicted as “ra – evil”, the opposite of “tov”: “Every thought of his heart was nothing but evil all the time”. As a result, God decides to destroy the world.

So is man "good" or "bad"?

#### **To discuss at the table:**

- Are people innately good? One of the morning prayers “Elokai Neshama” states: “God – the soul you gave me is pure.” Is that true?
- Are human traits and ethics inborn or are they all learned? Mankind is the final creation of the six days of creation. It seems as if man and woman

are the pinnacle of Creation. After humans are created, God charges humanity with responsibility over the world (1:28). God trusts mankind. Why then are man and woman not labelled as “good”? Does humankind demonstrate or shirk its responsibility?

- Why does God comment “It is good/very good” after his creations? What does the Torah communicate with this divine statement? See the ideas below by Prof. Nahum Sarna:

It is not to be wondered at that Mesopotamian society suffered from a malaise which scholars have characterized as "overtones of anxiety."... Man always found himself confronted by the tremendous forces of nature, and nature, especially in Mesopotamia, showed itself to be cruel, indiscriminate, unpredictable. Since the gods were immanent in nature, they too shared these same harsh attributes... Evil, then, was a permanent necessity and there was nothing essentially good in the pagan universe. The universe was purposeless...

Far different is the outlook of Genesis. ...God's pleasure at His own artistry, the repeated declaration, after each completed act of creation, that God saw how good His work was ...marks The mood of Hebrew civilization from that of Mesopotamia in a most revolutionary manner... history has become purposeful and society has achieved direction. A strong streak of optimism has displaced the acute awareness of insecurity. The all pervasive pagan consciousness of human impotence has given way to a profound sense of the significance of man. This basic belief in the essential goodness of the universe was ... destined to exert a powerful influence upon the direction of the religion of Israel. [Nahum Sarna – Understanding Genesis pgs 17-18]

- On The Second Day of Creation, the phrase "it was good" is absent. It appears twice in Day Three. Rashi comments:

Now why does it not say, “it was good” on the second day? Because the work involving the water was not completed until the third day, although He commenced it on the second day, and an unfinished thing is not in its fullness and its goodness. On the third day, when He completed the work of the water and He started and completed another work (the Land), He repeated “it was good” twice: once for the completion of the work of the second day and once for the completion of the work of that [third] day. [Gen. Rabbah 4:6]

In other words "It was Good" = It was complete.

So ... is man "complete"?

Shabbat shalom!