

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter I: Bereisheet (Gen. 1:1-6:8)

### Essay 17. The greatness of gold

**עוד** שם אמר ר' אבהו טובה גדולה חלק הקב"ה לעולמו בזהב, יש אדם פורט זהוב ומוציא ממנו כמה יציאות, שנאמר "וזהב הארץ ההוא טוב", מהו "טוב", טוביה דהוא בבימיה, טוביה דהוא בלינימיה וכו' עכ"ל. וצריך עיון דלאחר שאמר מסברה שטובה גדולה וכו' שיש אדם וכו' מה צורך לראיה דקאמר שנאמר וכו'? ועוד מהו שחזר ושאל מהו "טוב"? ומה קושיא היא זו? ועוד התירויץ שנאמן טוביה וכו' אינו ענין למה שאמר טובה גדולה חלק הקב"ה וכו'.

Also there in Midrash Rabbah, we read:

**Rabbi Abbahu said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave a great thing to His world, for a man exchanges one gold coin into copper coins and can use it for many purposes. This is as it is said, "The gold of that land is good" (Gen. 2:12).<sup>1</sup> What is [the meaning of] "good"? It is good when one is in the house and it is good when one lodges with it accompanying him. [Gold is of great value when one is at home and is also very useful to take with when one travels, as a small amount of it is of great value.]<sup>2</sup>**

**Examination is required, that after [the Midrash] said a logical argument that G-d gave a great thing upon the world, that a man exchanges one gold coin and can use it for many purposes, what need was there for the proof from Scripture, saying, "The gold of that land is good"? Also, what is the reason that [the Midrash] then asked, what is [the meaning of] "good"? Also, what is this difficulty? The Midrash just explained why gold is useful. Also, the solution that he gave, "It is good when one is in the house and it is good when one lodges with it accompanying him," this is not relevant to what it said, "The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave a great thing to the world."**

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. Rabbah 16:1.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. Rabbah 35:1.; Song of Songs Rabbah 3:10.

וגיש לומר דאמרינו בפרק ד' דמציעא הנהב קונה את הכסף, ומפרשינו בגמרא דנהבא פירא וכסףא טבעא משום דכסףא תריף בהוצאה ונהבא לא תריף. ורבי שנה לנו בילדותו הכסף קונה את הנהב משום דקסבר דנהבא טבעא וכסףא פירא והינו משום דנהבא חשיב וכסףא לא חשיב ועיי"ש.

**It can be said, as it is said in a Mishnah in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Bava Metziah:**

[When a buyer hands money to a merchant before the buyer moves the merchandise, the purchase is not yet finalized. It becomes final when the buyer moves the merchandise, and it is at that point that the merchant legally acquires the money.]

[Thus, when one type of currency is exchanged for another, handing over the first currency to the “merchant” of the second currency does not finalize the deal. It is when the second currency is handed over to the “buyer” of the second currency that the deal is finalized.]

**The gold acquires the silver.**

- Midrash Bava Metziah 4:1; Bava Metziah 44a

**It is explained in the Gemara that the Mishnah is discussing a case where the “buyer” is exchanging silver coins for gold coins held by “the merchant.” Thus, in that case, “gold is the merchandise, and silver is the currency.”<sup>3</sup> Why don't we view it the other way, that the one with the gold is buying silver, and the one with the silver is the merchant? **Because silver circulates easily, but gold does not circulate easily.** For example, many merchants today refuse to accept bills larger than \$20.**

**Rabbi Yehuda haNasi taught in his youth the opposite, that the silver acquires the gold, because gold is a currency and silver the merchandise, as gold is highly regarded, but silver is not highly regarded.**

ובנה יובנו דברי ר' אבהו, שמתחלה אומר טובה גדולה חלק וכו' שיש אדם פורט וכו' ומוציא ממנו וכו' ואתיא כמאן דאמר דנהבא טבעא. אמנם למאן דסבירא ליה דכסףא תריף בהוצאה יותר מנהבא אם כן אין זו טובה שחלק וכו' ולכן הביא קרא שנגאמר "וזהב" וכו', ואם תאמר על הקרא גופיה יש להקשות שהכסף יותר תריף בהוצאה ואם כן מהו "טוב", משום הכי תירץ הגם שאינו תריף בהוצאה, כשרוצה להטמינו בביתו או כשרוצה לצאת לדרכו אז הנהב הוא יותר טוב מהכסף, שאינו תופס כל כך מקום ואינו שוקל כל כך כבד למי שנושא עמו.

**By this, the words of Rabbi Abbahu will be understood, that initially he says, that G-d gave a great thing to the world, for a man changes one gold coin and can use it for many purposes. That follows the opinion that says that gold is a currency.**

**But according to the opinion that silver circulates more easily than gold, if so, it is not such a great thing that G-d gave to the world, for isn't silver a better currency? Therefore, [Rabbi Abbahu] brings Scripture that it is said, “and the gold of that land is good.” If you'll say on the verse itself that one can question that silver circulates more easily, and if so, then**

<sup>3</sup> Bava Metziah 45b.

**what is the meaning of “good.” Because of this, [Rabbi Abbahu] answers that even though gold does not circulate easily, when one wants to conceal it in his house or when he wants to go out on the road, then the gold is better than the silver, as it doesn’t take so much room and it does not weigh so much for one who carries it.**

ועוד יש לומר שמתחלה אמר שמה שאדם פורט זהוב ומוציא ממנו כמה הוצאות היא טובה גדולה, אבל על זה יש לומר אדרבא שאינה כל כך טובה הואיל שלפעמים אינו מוצא לפורטה, ואף כשירצה לפורטה צריך להפסיד איזו פרוטה שהשלקני משתפר כדתנו במעשר שני ובשקלים. משום הכי הביא ראיה שאף הפתוב קוראו "טוב", ואחר כך הרגיש אף על הפסוק למה קראו "טוב" והא יש להקשות כנ"ל.

**Also, it can be said that initially, he said that it is a very good thing that a man exchanges one gold coin and can use it for many purposes, but about this the contrary can be said, that it is not so good, because sometimes he can’t exchange it, not being able to find anyone to make the exchange.**

**Even when he finds someone who wants to exchange it, he will lose some *perutot* as the moneychanger’s profit, as we learned in tractate Maaser Sheni<sup>4</sup> and in tractate Shekalim.<sup>5</sup> Because of this, [Rabbi Abbahu] brought a proof that even Scripture called it “good,” but afterward he felt a question about the verse, why it called it “good,” and about this there was a reason to question, as above.**

ותירץ טובוי דהוא בביתיה, טובוי וכו' שאדרבא כל העולם תפצים ליקח הנהב כדי לשומרו במעט מקום או כדי להביאו בדרכים ולעולם ימצא לפורטה בלי שום הפסד. וירושלים שאני הואיל שהולכים שם כל ישראל ומביאים שם מעות מעשר שני ושקלים ואם היו כלם מביאים הנהב בנדאי שהיו הפרוטות מתקרות, אבל בעלמא אין חשש זה.

**He solves the problem that it is good when one is in the house and it is good when one lodges with it accompanying him. For, to the contrary of the above concerns, the entire world desires to take gold in order to place it in a small, secure spot, or in order to bring it on the road. He will always be able to exchange it without loss.**

Regarding the discussion in Maaser Sheni and Shekalim, that some money is lost in exchange, that refers to the pilgrimages to Jerusalem. **Jerusalem is different, since all Israel travels there and brings there the tithes of second ma’aser and Shekalim, and if all would bring gold, it’s certain that there would be a shortage of the copper perutot coins, and thus every perutot would be held dear. But elsewhere in the world, there is no such concern.**

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<sup>4</sup> Maaser Sheni 4:2: “Maaser sheni may be redeemed at the lower market price: At the price at which the shopkeeper buys and not at which he sells. At the price at which the money-changer takes small change and not at the price at which he gives small change. Maaser sheni may not be redeemed in an estimated lump. If its value is known, it may be redeemed according to the evaluation of one. But if its value is not known, it must be redeemed according to the evaluation of three, as for instance in the case of wine which has formed a film, or produce which has begun to rot, or coins which have become rusty.”

<sup>5</sup> Shekalim 4:9.