

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLV: Va'etchanan (Deut. 3:23–7:11)

Essay 9. The word “good” in the Ten Commandments

קמא פֿרַק ה' שָׁאַל ר' חַנִּינָא בְּן עֲגִיל לר' חֲזִיא בר אבָּא: מִפְּנֵי מָה, בְּדִבְרוֹת הֶרְאִישׁוּנִים לֹא נֶאֱמַר בָּהֶם "טוֹב", וּבְדִבְרוֹת הָאֲחֵרוֹנִים נֶאֱמַר בָּהֶם "טוֹב"? אָמַר לוֹ, עַד שְׁאַתָּה שׁוֹאַלְנִי, לְמָה נֶאֱמַר בָּהֶם "טוֹב", שְׁאַלְנִי אִם נֶאֱמַר בָּהֶם "טוֹב" אִם לֹא, שְׁאַיִנִי יוֹדֵעַ. אֶלָּא כִּלְךָ אֶצֶל ר' תַּנְחֻם וְכוּ'. אִזֵּל לַגְּבִיּה וְכוּ'. אָמַר לוֹ, הוּאִיל וְסוֹפֵן לְהַשְׁתַּבֵּר. וְכִי סוֹפֵן לְהַשְׁתַּבֵּר מֵאֵי הַגּוֹי? חַס וְשְׁלוֹם פְּסָקָה טוֹבָה מִן הָעוֹלָם.

Bava Kamma, chapter 5:

Rabbi Chanina ben Agil asked Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba: For what reason is [the word] “good” not stated in the first [version of the Ten] Commandments,¹ [whereas] in the latter [version of the Ten] Commandments, [the word] “good” is stated there?² [Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba] said to him: Before you ask me why [the word] “good” is stated, ask me if [the word] “good” is [actually] stated there or not, since [I am not sufficiently expert to remember the precise wording, and] I do not know if [the word] “good” is stated there or not. Rather, go to Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai . . . [and ask him].

[Rabbi Chanina ben Agil] went to him [and asked him]. [Rabbi Tanchum] said to him . . . since [the first tablets] [were] ultimately [destined] to be broken [after the sin of the Golden Calf].

[The Gemara asks:] **And [even] if [it had mentioned the term “good”, and] they were ultimately [destined] to break, what of it?** Rav Ashi said: [If this term had been mentioned in the first tablets, all] **good [would have], G-d forbid, ceased from the world³ [once they were broken].**

- Bava Kamma 54a–b

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¹ Ex. 20:12: “Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the L-rd your G-d is assigning to you.”

² Deut. 5:16: “Honor your father and your mother, as the L-rd your G-d has commanded you, that you may long endure, and that **it be good** [יִטֵּב] for you, in the land that the L-rd your G-d is assigning to you.”

³ Our version of the Gemara reads “from Israel.”

המאמר הזה תמונה דאיך מספקא ליה אם נאמר בהם "טוב" אם לאו וכי לא קרא עשרת הדברות מזמיו, ועוד לימי ספרא ולתחמי. ועוד קשה דקאמר עד שאמה שואלני, למה נאמר בהם "טוב" שגראה שעקר קושיתו היא בדברות האחרונים ואדרבא נראה שעקר קושיתו היא על דברות הראשונים, למה לא נאמר בהם "טוב" ובהכי אתי שפיר התירוץ לפי שסופן להשמר, והו אמת שהרי"ף בפירושו נראה שהיה גורס, עד שאמה שואלני, למה לא נאמר בהם "טוב" אבל הגרסאות שלנו אינן כן.

This statement is puzzling, for how would [Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba] have a doubt if it says “good” in the latter version of the Ten Commandments or if not, for didn’t he read the Ten Commandments in his days? Also, he could bring a Torah scroll and look.

Also, it’s difficult that he said, “before you ask me why [the word] ‘good’ is stated,” for it initially appears that the main point of his question was regarding the latter version of the Ten Commandments, which has the word “good”. But to the contrary, it appears that the true main point of his question was on the first version of the Ten Commandments, why the word “good” was not said in them. Thus, the offered solution, that [the first tablets] were ultimately destined to be broken, was fine. The truth is that the Rif⁴ in his explanation apparently had the textual reading, “before you ask me why [the word] ‘good’ is not stated,” i.e., in the first version of the Ten Commandments, but our textual readings are not so.

ונש לומר דר' חנינא תרמי קמבעיא ליה שהיה שואל בין על הראשונות בין על האחרונות, שהרי ידענו שאם ישראל לא היו חוטאים בעגל לא היה עוד יצר הרע בעולם ולא הייתה אומה ולשון שולטת בהם וכדכתיב, "למען ייטב להם ולבניהם לעלם", והיו נהנים בעולם הזה מעין טובת העולם הבא, ואין הכי נמי שהיה מתקיים בהם שכר מצות אף בעולם הזה.

It can be said that Rabbi Chanina ben Agil had two dilemmas, for he asked both about the first version of the Ten Commandments and also about the latter version of the Ten Commandments. For we know that if Israel hadn’t sinned with the Golden Calf, there would be no evil inclination in the world and no nation or tongue would rule over them.⁵ This is as it is written, “so that it may be good for them and their children forever.”⁶ They would have had enjoyment in this world similar to the goodness of the World-to-Come. It is indeed so that the reward of the commandments would have existed even in this world.

⁴ This is not the earlier and more famous “Rif” [Rabbi Isaac Alfasi (1013-1103)], but rather Rabbi Josiah ben Joseph Pinto (c. 1565–c. 1648), Syrian rabbi and preacher, a disciple of Rabbi Chaim Vital. His sefer, *Me’or Enayim* (Part One: Venice 1643; Part Two: Mantua 1743) was a commentary on Rabbi Jacob ibn Habib’s *Ein Yaakov*, a compilation of Aggadic material from the Talmud, and both parts are now commonly printed together with the *Ein Yaakov*. See *Me’or Enayim* (Venice 1643).

⁵ *Avodah Zarah* 5a. See also *Eruvin* 54b and *Ketubot* 66b.

⁶ *Deut.* 5:26.

ומשום הכי הנה מסתפק ושואל למה לא נאמר בהם "טוב" אם אדרבא היו ראויים אז לשכר מצות אף בעולם הזה. ועוד הנה קשי ליה להפוך שלאסתר שחטאו שחזר יצר הרע למקומו ומשום הכי שכר מצות בהאי עלמא ליכא למה בדברות האחרונים נאמר בהם "טוב".

For that reason, [Rabbi Chanina ben Agil] had a doubt and asked why it didn't say "good" within the first version of the Ten Commandments if, to the contrary, they deserved then the reward of fulfilling the commandments, even in this world.

Also, he had a question to the contrary. After they sinned, the evil inclination returned to its place. If as a result of this, there's no reward in this world for fulfilling the commandments, then why in the latter Ten Commandments does it say "good"?

והוא השיב לו שאינו יודע אם נאמר בהם "טוב" אם לאו פלומר אינו יודע אם ה"טוב" המוזכר בדברות אחרונות הוא לעולם הזה או לעולם הבא, שהרי בפירוש קמא דקודושין סבירא ליה לר' יעקב דשכר מצות בהאי עלמא ליכא ופליגי רבנן עליה וסבירא להו דיש שכר מצות בהאי עלמא. וסתם מתניתין דפאה רבנן אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהם בעולם הזה וכו', וכמו שפירש שם מהרש"א על רמי ליה רבא לרב נחמן ועיי"ש.

[Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba] replied to him that he didn't know if it said "good" or not, that is, he did not know whether the "good" mentioned in the latter version of the Ten Commandments was for this world or for the World-to-Come. I.e., the *Zera Shimshon* doesn't accept the simple interpretation that Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba didn't remember the text of the Torah, or didn't think to bring a scroll and check it. Instead, he was addressing a deeper question.

In the first chapter of tractate Kiddushin (39b), it's the opinion of Rabbi Ya'akov that there is no reward in this world for fulfilling the commandments, but the rabbis disagree with him, and their opinion was that there is a reward in this world for fulfilling the commandments.

An unattributed Mishna of tractate Pe'ah agrees with the rabbis, "The following are the things for which a man eats the fruits in this world while the principal remains for him in the world to come: Honoring one's father and mother; the performance of righteous deeds; and the making of peace between a person and his friend; and the study of the torah is equal to them all."⁷ This is also as the Maharsha⁸ explained on Kiddushin 40a, where Rava raised a contradiction to Rav Nachman as to why the above list didn't include sending a mother bird away from her nest before taking her eggs, Deut. 22:6–7, for which the Torah promises, "that it will be good for you and you will have a long life." Rav Nachman answered that the above list is not all-inclusive.

⁷ Mishnah Pe'ah 1:1.

⁸ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels ("the Maharsha") (1555–1631), *Chiddushei Agadot*.

ובנה תירץ לו הקושץא על הדברות האחרונות, דאליבא דרבנן וסתם מתניתין אין הכי נמי דשכר מצות בהאי עלמא איבא. ועוד אפלו ר' יעקב לא אמר אלא בןחיד אבל בצבור הזוכים אף הוא מודה דשכר מצות בהאי עלמא איבא, והן הן כל היעודים וההבטחות של התורה "והיה עקב תשמעון" וכו' וכמו שפירש מהרש"א ועיי"ש בקידושין.

In this way, the question about the latter version of the Ten Commandments is solved, that according to the rabbis and the unattributed Mishna of tractate Pe'ah, there is a reward in this world for fulfilling the commandments. Also, even Rabbi Ya'akov said that there was no reward in this world for fulfilling the commandments only regarding an individual, but for a community meriting to fulfill the commandments, he acknowledged that there is a reward in this world for fulfilling the commandments. These are all the allotments and promises of the Torah, "And if you do obey these rules and observe them carefully, the L-rd your G-d will maintain faithfully for you the covenant made on oath with your fathers . . ."⁹ This is **as the Maharsha explained, and see there in Kiddushin**, that for an individual, the reward is saved for the World-to-Come, while a community that fulfills the commandments will receive a reward in this world, such as receiving rain in the proper season.

אמנם עדיין היה צריך תירוץ על הקושץא הראשונה למה בדברות הראשונות לא נאמר בהם "טוב", ואמר לו פלג וכו' ואמר לו מפני שסופן להשתבר וחס ושלום פסקה טובה וכו', שהואיל שאלו הדברות ענינם בנדאי היה על טובות העולם הזה, לאחר שגשתברו היינו אומרים אליבא דכולי עלמא שכר מצות בהאי עלמא ליבא בין ליחיד בין לצבור וחס ושלום פסקה טובה וכו', ומשום הכי לא כתב בהם "טוב".

However, [Rabbi Chanina ben Agil] still needed an explanation for the first question, why for the first version of the Ten Commandments does it not say "good," and [Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba] said to him, "go to Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai . . . [and ask him]," and [Rabbi Tanchum] said to him, "since [the first tablets] [were] ultimately [destined] to be broken [after the sin of the Golden Calf,] and Rav Ashi said, "[If this term had been mentioned in the first tablets, all] good [would have], G-d forbid, ceased from the world [once they were broken]."

We've discussed above that if not for the sin of the Golden Calf, no nation or tongue would rule over Israel, and they would have had enjoyment in this world similar to the goodness of the World-to-Come. **Thus, as these initial set of Ten Commandments were definitely about the good things in this world, after they had been broken, we would have said that the entire world agreed that there is no reward in this world for fulfilling the commandments. That would have been true whether for an individual or for the community, and G-d forbid goodness would cease from the world. Because of this, the word "good" wasn't written in them.**

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⁹ Deut. 7:12.