

This week's Dvar Torah is provided by Rabbi Aaron Frank

Enemies Put Down Your Swords

A Call to Truce Between Good and Great

In this week's parsha, as the Jews are finally leaving behind the torment of slavery on the shores of the Reed Sea, they are a nation destined for greatness. They have come a long way. According to tradition, they preserved Brit Milah and other mitzvot in the difficult environment of Egypt. They have also grown tremendously in their great belief in Moshe and in God. (14:31)

Yet, the entire experience in Egypt was not without much reluctance and complaints. In one of the pages in this week's Daf Yomi cycle, Talmud Arachin 15a, Rav Huna actually says that the Jews of that generation were weak of faith.

So are they at a moment of greatness or of "good enough"ness to be redeemed? I am not sure of the answer, but I have often thought about the concepts of good and great and if they clash or not.

In his popular book, Good to Great, Jim Collins writes, "Good is the enemy of great." On the other hand, it was Voltaire that said, "Perfect is the enemy of good." And this makes sense.

Just look at Steve Jobs who tirelessly insisted on perfection. His obsession changed an industry because good was not good enough. The defeat of good truly changed how we communicate and live. No matter

where we are, we want those closest to us to reach higher and not to settle for second best. Yes, good can get in the way of great.

But striving for greatness can also present a real danger. Our culture expects perfection and greatness in a way that is unrealistic. We live in, what William Helmrich calls a "Disposable Society." Whether it is a car or a toaster, we throw things away that don't work great. This dynamic has leaked out into our relationships. In a society where celebrities divorce after 72 days or when 70 percent of divorces involve "low conflict situations", good has possibly become the enemy of perfect. As Dr. Alex Lickerman wrote, "if we allow ourselves to remain at the mercy of our desire for perfection, not only will the perfect elude us, so will the good."

Good and great can certainly live in tension. Yet, I would like to try to offer another approach.

On Day Six of creation, we read that "God saw everything that God did and it was tov meod, -- very good." (Gen 1:31) This tov meod is what we might call great. The Ramban, Nachmanides tells us that what was great was the goodness of the order -- not everything that was created was great, everything was good. It was how God set up the priorities in creating the world that was great. When synthesized well, all of the "goods" can combine to great.

Good and great need to live together realizing that sometimes one will be emphasized and the other will not. While we know that we should continue to strive, we have to be content knowing that as finite beings, there is no way that we can achieve greatness in every area of our lives. We must shoot for the moon, while knowing that we won't get there every time and in every way.

Just like in the case of maybe a very good or even a great Am Yisrael leaving Egypt or with God's Creation, we must remember that it is how we order and balance our lives that define our legacy. There will be goods and there will be greats, but they must live together in a blessed dance---a blessed dance that is truly great.

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