

Give Thanks To G-d For He Is Good

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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In my opinion, one of the greatest verses in the entire Bible has got to be Psalm 118:1. ***“Give thanks to G-d for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.”***

This verse tells me many things. First of all, it tells me that G-d is good. By being good, G-d is not bad. Although G-d is the Creator of all bad things (Isaiah 45:7), still He Himself is not the bad that He created and allows too exist.



G-d's mercy endures forever. However, this is not a promise that I am entitled to always receive that Divine mercy. What belongs to G-d is His. I have no rights to any entitlements from Heaven. Just because G-d created me does not mean that he owes me anything. On the contrary, it is I who owe Him everything. If anyone has a claim of entitlement, it is G-d who has a claim on us. After all, He gave us everything we have, even our very existence and identities belong to Him. Does G-d not have the right to ask for something in return for all that He has endowed to us?

This is why I thank G-d that He is good. For He knows better than any of us the force of bad (evil) that He has created. He knows how much evil can wreck havoc in the lives and world that He has made. Although G-d created evil and allows it to exist, still the Divine commandment is for us to ***“separate from evil and to do good”*** (Psalm 34:15).

G-d's mercy endures forever, but this does not mean that G-d's wrath does not exist. The Bible is full of references to G-d's wrath. Yet, while such wrath can indeed be devastating, still, it seems to be limited. For whenever G-d's wrath flairs up, it seems to last for only a short while and then a semblance of calm and peace is restored. So, in the end it is His mercy and not His wrath that endures.

Good times and bad times always come in cycles. No matter how righteous and pious one may be, there is no Divine promise entitling one to a trouble-free life. Anyone who believes that religion and ritual are guaranteed safeguards against bad things happening is not in touch with the realities that G-d has made and through which He operates His world. Bad times and bad occurrences happen all the time and all the while G-d is good and His mercy endures. Even in the worst of times, G-d is good and His mercy endures. Although I am entitled to nothing and I will never have the right to point a finger to Heaven and demand from G-d that “He owes me,” still, G-d is good and His mercy endures forever.

As a mere, mortal human being, I am not aware of the Divine plan. I have no idea of what G-d is doing or for what, if any, reasons things happen the way they do. For try as I may, I am not master of my own destiny. Although I act with righteousness and influence much and many, still, even my greatest influence has a very limited scope, in view of the greater scheme in life.

As much as I work hard to create a better world, evil still exists and works harder than I ever can to fulfill the purpose for which G-d created it. I cannot fight the Will of G-d. I can indeed resist evil, I can indeed choose good, but fight as it as I may, I can never defeat evil and annihilate it entirely.

How I can destroy that which G-d has made? I can remove it from one place, but it always appears in another. I can distance myself from evil, yet even as I draw closer and closer to that which is good, I can still see that evil is out there, distant from me, true, but never distant enough for me to be entirely safe. And G-d is good and His mercy endures forever.

Why are things the way they are? Or maybe it is better to ask, why do things appear the way that they appear? Are things indeed the way I think they are? Are my perceptions of reality clear and accurate? Maybe I am not seeing “the big picture” clearly? Maybe the way things really are and the way I perceive them are entirely different? Maybe a good part of any problem is not the problem itself, but rather, how the problem is perceived in the eye of the beholder?

If what I see and how I see it is a fusion of both good and evil, then maybe by separating from evil and choosing good, I can see the good in every circumstance and recognize the evil therein too and chose to distance myself from it. Maybe in this way I can come to see the good of G-d in everything, even in what otherwise looks bad and evil. This does not in any way mean that evil all of a sudden becomes good. No! Such a concept is itself evil, a deception and a lie. But rather, by looking for the “silver lining” in everything bad, I might just discover hidden opportunities. This is good and possibly an expression of the Divine eternal mercy.

Evil exists, there is no doubt about it. G-d created evil to test the faithful. Resisting evil defines what is good. Good is doing what is right, doing right is the meaning of being righteous. Being righteous means fighting evil. Fighting evil is good, fighting evil is righteous. Surrendering to evil or being passive before it is evil. One who is silent or passive in the face of evil will eventually be overcome by it. The silent and the passive always end up becoming either agents of evil or the victims of evil. There is no escaping this inevitable truth.

G-d is good and we experience His good best when we ourselves are good. This is another inevitable truth. His mercy endures forever and we become conduits for His enduring mercy only when we distance ourselves from evil and do good. Good and mercy go together. Evil has no part in either. It is wrong to show mercy to evil. Evil must not endure. Evil only endures when one shows to it mercy. Showing mercy to evil clouds over good and conceals it. When this occurs, evil reigns, and good and mercy are overrun. Yet, in the end, good will triumph. Mercy will prevail. Evil and all those who embrace it or who are silent or passive before it will pass away. It is inevitable. There is no escaping this truth.

“Surely good and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life” (Psalm 23:6). Yes indeed! Good and mercy pursue us, they run after us to overtake us. The problem is that those whose judgment is clouded by evil cannot discern what is rightly good and merciful. They pervert goodness and mercy. In their twisted minds they replace evil for good and good for evil. They reverse mercy and severity, showing mercy to evil and severity to good. Because they do things so backwards, true good and mercy appears to the twisted and lost as something to be feared. Therefore, instead of embracing G-d's good and the Divine mercy, they flee from it as one would flee from a terrifying enemy.

Yet, **“give thanks to G-d for His mercy endures forever.”** And, His “good and mercy shall pursue you.” G-d seeks our good and our betterment. G-d is very patient with us and teaches us slowly, but surely. G-d pursues us for good, even when we fear the revelation of His truth and run the opposite way in terror.

Give thanks to G-d for He is good. For although we are our own worst enemies, G-d is still always our best friend.