

One Good Eye

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February 5, 2015



It was finally Friday afternoon, almost time for Shabbat and some long overdue rest. Jerry had returned from a long overseas business trip and hadn't been at his familiar seat in shul for several weeks. As the men filed in for the *Minchah* service, Jerry was greeted by the Rabbi with a hearty "*Shalom Aleichem.*"

Jerry tried to pray properly, but his mind wasn't at ease, there was just so much catching up to do. He pictured all the places he had been to and the people he had met. Before he knew it, he was taking three steps back as he completed the *Amidah* prayer. Once again, Jerry heard the Rabbi wishing him, "*Shalom Aleichem.*"

"Huh?" Jerry thought to himself, staring at the Rabbi. The Rabbi whispered, "True, I welcomed you back from your first overseas trip, but I wanted to welcome you back from this last trip as well!"

We often live our lives subconsciously feeling, "I am the ultimate example of a religious hypocrite." We think, "Maybe I prayed with some intensity and concentration this morning, but already this afternoon my mind was wandering and distant from the words of the siddur." Or, "I may have seen the good points in my friend, spouse or business associate yesterday, but today they couldn't do anything right. I am back to being such a negative person."

We quickly become convinced that we haven't made any progress, and that whatever measure of good we thought we'd accomplished is either nonexistent or wiped out by now. But is this true? We have all been taught that two wrongs don't make a right, but what about the opposite? Am I erasing the good deed I've done by later doing something that implies the opposite? If my future behavior isn't at the higher standard of my earlier actions, does that mean I was insincere and have only been deluding myself until now?

Well, thankfully, God already answered this question for us! Jewish sources teach that the entire creation and history of civilization was only a prelude for the most important event ever. This event was so great that it was actually the *raison d'être* for everything that came before it. This event was the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

One could assume that the Jewish People had to be spiritually worthy in order to receive this ultimate gift. Certainly they had to be completely sincere and dedicated to following what was written in the Torah. And yet God says about the Jewish People at Sinai, "You have captured My heart with *one* of your eyes" (Song of Songs 4:9). Why only one? Because the other eye was already looking at the Golden Calf, waiting for the moment

it could be worshipped! (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:55).

Surely there couldn't be a greater hypocrisy than this. At the very giving of the Torah, there were elements of our nation who already had their eye on defiling all that was written. As our Sages teach, "Idol worship is equivalent to transgressing the entire Torah" (*Shevuot* 29a). And yet God was drawn toward us because of our one good eye!

Good is true and eternal. Nothing I do will ever negate the value and absolute purity of a good deed, thought or desire. Every bit of good that I do is forever cherished by God and safeguarded for my eternal reward. Now is not the time to despair, but to strengthen myself and start again, because whatever good I do from now on remains with me always!

Based on Sichot HaRan (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom) #123